PUBLISHING THE EXPERIENCES OF MORMON WOMEN SINCE 1974

EXPONENT II

Celebrating 40 years of Exponent II with new essays from:

JOANNA BROOKS

CLAUDIA BUSHMAN

JUDY DUSHKU

MAXINE HANKS

LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

AND MANY MORE . . .

FALL 2014/WINTER 2015 VOL. 34 NO. 2 & 3

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COVER ARTIST STATEMENT

ANGELA ELLSWORTH • PHOENIX, ARIZONA • aellsworth.com

Seer Bonnets are an ongoing series of scupltural pioneer bonnets covered in thousands of steel, pearl-tipped corsage pins that create subtle patterns on the exteriors and sharp, rugged interiors. Standing in for the estimated 35 wives of Joseph Smith, the bonnets become the "tools of translation" which allow these resilient wives to see messages and translate them into visions. This is a nod to the tools Smith used to tranlate the Book of Mormon. Ellsworth re-imagines this community of women with their own visionary and revelatory powers, as they pioneer new personal histories.

"Seer Bonnets: A Continuing Offense"

What is EXPONENT II?

The purpose of *Exponent II* is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

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Submissions received by mail will not be returned.

We are always looking for artwork and photography to accompany our writing. Please send jpegs or gifs of art submissions to our email. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.

CORRECTION:

In the Summer 2014 issue of Exponent II, the poem "Art Takes Us," by Carma de Jong Anderson, was incorrectly formatted due to a technological error. Our most sincere apologies to the author.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD//
EXPONENT II: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Whenever people talk about *Exponent II*'s origin story, the word "discover" is always used. In 1972 Susan Kohler "discovered" a stack of original *Woman's Exponent,* published a century earlier, whose purpose was to advocate for "the Rights of the Women of Zion, and the Rights of the Women of all Nations." And as you can read in the retrospective essays of Claudia Bushman, Laurel Ulrich and Judy Dushku, within two years of that unearthing a brave group of women in Cambridge would decide that the time was right to start anew.

But the birth of *Exponent II* is a discovery in other ways as well. I love listening to women talk about how and when they "discovered" *Exponent II*. Some found stacks of old issues in their feminist aunt's house. Others discovered it as it was passed to them by a friend, a visiting teacher, a mother-in-law. Maxine Hanks found it in the library at Ricks College and remarks in her essay that she "felt like she'd stumbled into a secret club, a hive of free-thinking feminists…. Their voices were like a beacon of light piercing the night in Idaho." My own discovery came when I moved to the Boston area in 1996 and immediately met Judy Dushku and Linda Hoffman Kimball who introduced me to the ward, the town, and *Exponent II*. I had spent so much time feeling so alone in my feminism, that reading the paper was a revelation to me. It was as if I'd finally come home.

Another way that *Exponent II* promotes discovery is that we have always encouraged first-time writers. For nearly ten years I served as an editor and it was a privilege to witness women "discover" their voices as they told their stories and shared their wisdom. It changes people to record their story. Instead of something happening *to* them, the writing process allows the teller to claim and shape the events of their lives. There is catharsis. Insight. Discovery.

As an editor I often approached women and asked them to write for us. "Who me?" they replied. "But I have nothing to say." It still amazes me how a woman's "nothing" has often turned out to be the most exquisite essay, or poetry, or art. I remember asking a very young Aimee Evans Hickman to write an essay version of her retreat introduction about her experiences with mother goddesses in South America. She put up a fight but eventually handed over a story whose imagery of falling petals is with me to this day. Past editors of the magazine were asked what their favorite stories were and we have the honor of reprinting articles selected by Sue Booth-Forbes, Sue Howe, Nancy Dredge, and Emily Clyde Curtis.

Of course we readers are also part of the discovery as we follow along on the journey and are moved or angered or changed in some way by the things we read. Most recently our issue on Women and the Priesthood opened many dialogues and has even become recommended reading in some wards and stakes. And yet for many women, *Exponent II* does not reach far enough. Aimee Evans Hickman's essay wrestles with the notion, as one reader put it, that *Exponent II* will "get a bit more radical." Though they do not use that phrase, several essays in this issue recognize that while *Exponent II* has worked hard to create room at the table, many of our sisters still have no seats. Emily Clyde Curtis shares how a single essay submission transformed her relationship with the LGBTQ community. Gina Colvin urges us to see the importance of a global vision. Chelsea Sue acknowledges that while the Exponent community has served her needs as a feminist, as a woman of color she must seek other communities. We are not done growing. We can and will do better.

Everything I've written about the magazine can also be said for *The Exponent* blog. Just as the Cambridge women took the original *Woman's Exponent* and transformed it for a new time and place, so too the newest incarnation has explored new territory and sought to provide a forum for our ageless question, "Am I not a woman and a sister?" In her essay "Nearly a Decade of Online Discussion and Friendship," Caroline Kline points out the advantages of the democratic, immediate, and "hierarchy-bending" nature of the blog. Women who have never seen the magazine are discovering us online. In her essay Amy Cartwright tells of stumbling across The Exponent blog during a faith crisis. As she read EmilyCC's essay on doubt, she felt "an incredible relief at the experience of vulnerability and authenticity." With the international series and the ever-expanding posts that are translated into other languages, we are witnessing a fulfillment of a promise made 140 years ago by our foremothers of the *Woman's Exponent* who sought to advocate for "the Rights of the Women of Zion, and the Rights of Women of all Nations." It has been a privilege to stand on their shoulders for 40 years. Happy anniversary.

Heather Sundahl
Long-time member of Exponent II *Board and Staff*
Belmont, Massachusetts

REMEMBERING EXPONENT II:
a beacon in the east

I was studying alone on the second floor of the Ricks College library, watching the snow cover icy sidewalks as students inched up the incline. Needing a break from biology, I roamed the shelves, inexplicably pulled toward an aisle where an apparently misplaced magazine attracted me. Its pages were covered in semi-psychedelic drawings and funky handmade typefaces. Surely this was a mistake that the librarians would soon remove. I took the paper in my hands and touched pages that seemed taboo. Glancing around, I sneaked it back to my carrel, where my eyes consumed each page, wondering who these Mormon women were, and how they found the courage to produce this paper. | By Maxine Hanks • Salt Lake City, Utah

Encountering *Exponent II* was an epiphany: I knew I wasn't alone. There were other women like me in the Church, feminists—in the 1970s. It was an unimagined validation to a stressed teen struggling for Self. I'd stumbled into a secret club, a hive of free-thinking feminists, ensconced in Boston, across the continent. Their voices streamed like a beacon light piercing the night in Idaho. These women were brave enough to put their inner-selves onto paper, into print and send it across the country to my school. In 1976, I'd never seen anything like it. Yet it felt like home.

Exponent II's artsy pages embraced headlines that blew my mind—visible assertions of inner truths and invisible struggles that were so controversial then: "*Woman's Exponent* Revisited," "What the ERA Will Mean to You," "Sisters and Suffragists," "women: education," "Notes on the Self Concept," "To Have A Career or Be a Homemaker?," "Me, A Sister Missionary?," "Women and the Priesthood," "The Mormon Female Experience," and "Closet Feminists." These women were not only thinking what I was thinking, they were speaking it, out-loud. The headlines really said—"It's OK to Be Me"—after all. I wasn't the only alien in Mormondom. I was a feminist, "women's libber," avowed single, mission-hungry, honors student, and writer, co-chairing "Women's Week" with themes like "Woman Clothed with the Sun." I was a misfit: a liberal intellectual, nonconformist loner in a conservative workingclass family culture. God had dropped me in Idaho, but there were people like me in the East.

Boston seemed a world away, like a dream of Harvard or MIT. *Exponent II* bridged that distance with a glimpse of the Ivy League. Feminist writings from Claudia Bushman, Laurel T. Ulrich, Judy Dushku, Nancy Dredge, Carrel Sheldon, Lorie Winder, and Sue Paxman floated across pages illustrated by Carolyn Durham's feministic artistic flair. These were Eastern women; I never dreamed I would know them.

I missed *Exponent II* when I left school to work, then serve an LDS mission. However, its pages stayed with me, confirming my inner life. It had introduced me to Mormon women's studies, adding LDS history to my interests. When a mission quiz asked, "What magazine takes its name from an LDS women's publication of the 1880s?" I quipped, "*Exponent II*, named for *The Woman's Exponent*." "How did you know that?" the Elders asked. "I read *Exponent II*," I said. In 1979, I was privy to hidden discourse found only in liberal Mormon publications. *Exponent II* validated my Mormonism and my feminism, as a devoted LDS sister who entered men's work, and wouldn't oppose the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) or the IWY (International Women's Year).

"*Woman Walking*" by Alice Bell Hemming • Kensington, Maryland

At BYU, I found *Exponent II* in the library and resumed my relationship. I worked for the College of Humanities in the 1980s editing manuscripts. Yet I envied my friends who went East to Boston for internships at *Exponent II*, as each returned a new person. I believed Boston could transform me too, but I couldn't fathom how to get there. *Exponent II* was East, and I was West, so I wrote for the *Seventh East Press* and *Sunstone*. Yet *Exponent II*'s deeply personal voices mentored me, helping me find my own. Mormon women's prose and poetry emerging in the '80s inspired me to write innumerable poems, texts, essays, manuscripts, and pieces of personal narrative, in private files and computers. It was enough just to get them out of me.

Mormon feminist writings in the '80s were flickering lights in the dark night between Sonia Johnson's excommunication in 1979 and the Mormon Women's Forum in 1988. Few remember how feared feminism was then—simply using the word was taboo.

Exponent II stood nearly alone on the Mormon landscape in the 1980s; we had *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*, but the only feminist publications were *Exponent II* and the Mormons for ERA newsletter. Mormon feminist writings in the '80s were flickering lights in the dark night between Sonia Johnson's excommunication in 1979 and the Mormon Women's Forum in 1988. Few remember how feared feminism was then—simply using the word was taboo. Women treaded water in a deluge of men's views. We could barely speak, much less find our own language. We had no voice nor vocabulary for our own voicelessness. We tried to write female texts in male words. We had no feminist context, no community, no internet, no blogs. We huddled in isolated groups at *Exponent II*, Mormons for ERA, the Algie Ballif Forum, BYU, U of U, and the Mormon Women's Forum. We didn't know we were a discourse, half a religion. We swam in a sea of malespeak, our voices like buoys, too far apart.

Exponent II kept Mormon feminism afloat in the 1980s by rafting women's voices together and reviving the memory of our feminist foremothers via "the spiritual descendent of *The Woman's Exponent*." *Exponent II* was our historical bridge between past and present. It was also a beacon in the East, guiding Mormon feminism safely into the 1990s, where we could finally know a discourse of our own.

The solution was simply more of the same—collect feminist texts from the beginning to the present, as evidence of another discourse amid the dominant one. Partly inspired by *Exponent II*, I compiled *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* in 1987-92, to bridge the gaps between Mormon feminists and their texts. It united feminists scattered across time and space, together in one place, one discourse. I excerpted feminist writings from the *Woman's Exponent, Exponent II, Dialogue, Sunstone*, the Algie Ballif Forum, MERA, BYU, MWF and personal interviews.

I chose thirty of my favorite pieces from *Exponent II*, Vols. 1-16, with phrases like, "I voted 'no' in sacrament meeting" . . . "Understanding our Heavenly Mother by praying" . . . "Girls get to pass the sacrament, too, right?" . . . "Mother-in-heaven [sic] could be recognized as the head of the Relief Society" . . . "Why not have a general conference when we hear only from the wives?" My selection ended with brave words about abortion.

Amazingly, *Exponent II* always told the truth while maintaining a middling image. When the Mormon Women's Forum emerged in 1988 (started by Karen Case), it was seen as more confrontational, political while *Exponent II* was viewed as more conciliatory, personal. Yet in 1990-92 when Utah and the nation opposed abortion rights, we protested at the Capitol, and *Exponent II* gave us wrenchingly real stories.

I'll never forget *Exponent II*, Vol. 15 No 4, "Abortion:Learning to Speak from Experience," along with Vol.16 No. 1 "Adoption vs. Abortion." Mormon

women asserted that "abortion does not kill the spirit; what it does mean is that spirit is forced to go elsewhere" and "adoption is not a solution to abortion . . . I was not supposed to go through this tragedy so that some family could have my baby." At the Mormon Women's Forum we were so affected by *Exponent II*, we devoted an issue of the *MWF Quarterly* to abortion in 1992.

We were not more brave than *Exponent II*, but MWF countered the Church in Salt Lake City. Church discipline of feminists was rare before the 1990s. The one thing we "'90s Five" had in common (Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Janice Allred, Margaret Toscano, and me—women disciplined in 1993-2000), was that we all worked on the Mormon Women's Forum. (I was on the Board 1989-99 and coedited the *Quarterly*.)

In the aftermath of the "purge of 1993," Judy Dushku closed the distance between *Exponent II* and MWF by keynoting at Counterpoint in Salt Lake. She embraced us Forum heretics with *Exponent II* motherly love. She also symbolized an invisible link between East and West—Mormon feminists from Idaho who moved beyond their roots (like Sonia, Laurel, Judy, Lavina, me, and others).

A decade later, I went east. I was studying theology at Harvard, sitting with grad students in the basement of the HDS library, warming my soul in the fire of our ideas. It was 2006, the "50th Anniversary of Women at HDS," and I was on fellowship that semester, finally arriving in Boston. Judy took me to my first Exponent meeting—exactly thirty years after I first found *Exponent II* at Ricks.

The evening was surreal. We gathered in Nancy Dredge's living room with Laurel, Judy, Carrel, and Barbara Taylor, and younger women like Kate Holbrook and Aimee Evans Hickman. They wanted to hear about my fellowship, my work, and my story.

Yet they had been with me all along, from the beginning, in the mid-'70s. Their stories had always inhabited my heart, helping me write my own.

Beds: A Memoir

By Fae Ellsworth • Virgin, Utah

"Every angel is terrifying."
– RANIER MARIE RILKE

Cradle draped in pink satin
ticking-covered mattress
straw mat I spun to gold
the manger and wise woman
standing over with myrrh

The holy bed of Hail Merry
full of grace of Bernadette of Lourdes
bed with prying eyes
bed of intimidation

A bed of ballet dancer wallpaper
and sky-blue sheers – that same
bed where my grandfather died
the bed of a cot in basement

The bed of a disappointed wedding night
the bed of the cult of tuna casserole
the bed of sterile cheer

The birthing bed of four babes
the bed of cocked ears
the bed of severed hopes
the bed of alone

A bed of rose petals
and Turkish delights
a bed of thrilling shamefulness
the bed of the white-eyelet nightie

A bed of sorrow, migraines, indebtedness
a bed of black and blue
the bed where I let the bed bugs bite

The bed I made and had to lie in
a bed of flames, embers
a bed of dust
a bed of tired

The bed of connubial bliss
a bed of roses and laurels
a bed of linens made of mourning

The bed of dreaming while awake.

"Bonnet XX (Emily Partridge)" by Angela Ellsworth • Phoenix, Arizona

Living *and* Writing HISTORY

History is complex. There is no one really authentic story. We all just tell the story as we see it, and as we see it then. We see the same things differently. And the way we see our stories changes over time.

Delivered by Claudia L. Bushman in Potomac, Maryland • April 26, 2014

The founding of *Exponent II* has become a mythic event. I should know, as I have added to its mythical origins myself, none too subtly, on many occasions. When a young woman at the University of California at Berkeley contacted me recently about her plans to write a senior paper comparing *The Woman's Exponent* and *Exponent II*, I cautioned her to try to use contemporary documents rather than those that lean toward historical and retrospective extravagance. I told her that it was my husband's idea that we start a newspaper and that

the model he had in mind was a little newspaper insert that the early *Sunstone Magazine* used to have. She said I was wrong, that *Exponent II* was inspired by Susan Kohler's discovery of the bound volumes of *Woman's Exponent* in Harvard's Widener Library. I said that we wrote the newspaper for ourselves and our friends and had little interest in trying to reform Salt Lake City. She disagreed. She said that we had sent copies to Church headquarters where people disapproved and told us to stop publishing the paper. Moreover, she quoted sources written by me over the years that said those things. She said that if I didn't know the real story, could I please direct her to someone who did.

What could I say? I had written those things. I've written or told the story many times for one purpose or another, and although I do repeat myself, I don't like to do it. I'm always reaching for new things to say. It's a great, great story, one with pay-off all down the line. It's all true, all of it, the mundane, the luscious, the sorrowful, the triumphant. Things happened fast and dramatically in those days. Nobody knows the story better than I do. I was there—a present participant—complicit in all the activities and decisions of those early days, and I now tell the story however I want.

That's what I do. I write history. History is complex. There is no one really authentic story. We all just tell the story as we see it, and as we see it then. We see the same things differently. And the way we see our stories changes over time. We are influenced by the story that develops after the fact. Some events are caused or influenced by other events, others are coincidental. For instance, being as accurate as I can be at this much later date, I would say that the planning of the paper and Susan's discovery of the bound *Woman's Exponent* issues were parallel stories. One did not cause the other. They didn't come together until we were considering a name for the paper and it occurred to me that we could combine the tracks and I suggested *Exponent II*. I don't think that the paper was inspired or directed by *Woman's Exponent*.

We did have access to Harvard's volumes of *Woman's Exponent*. We also had on loan Barnard Silver's complete run of the paper. We did read the volumes from time to time and copy out sections to include in the paper or to use for church programs, but *Exponent II* and its content was not inspired by the older paper, but rather by present concerns. Our group of women in Boston had been so successful in every one of our endeavors (the "Pink Issue" of *Dialogue, Mormon Sisters, Beginner's Boston,* etc.). I came home from one of our successful events and reported it to my husband. Everything we had done turned to gold. But what else was there to do? Richard suggested a newspaper. I reported it at our next meeting and people were enthusiastic. We did it.

While we should always privilege the accounts of an event closest to its creation, we must also see the richness of a moment that makes a difference in retrospect. History is malleable. Hearing this you may decide that I am a frivolous person, given to extravagant overstatements. You will probably decide that I am not very serious, but that would not be accurate. I am always serious, just not very.

I would say that there has been a net loss of opportunity and responsibility for women in the Church in the last 40 years. I always say, and I do believe, that the effort has been to build up men rather than to oppress women. But the effect of reigning in the auxiliaries and of placing them firmly under the direction of the priesthood has been to lessen responsibility and opportunity for women.

One of my assignments for this talk was to trace the growth of feminism in the Church in the last forty years. I think women have made many interesting strides in that time but not within the Church. In fact, I would say that there has been a net loss of opportunity and responsibility for women in the Church in the last forty years. I always say, and I do believe, that the

effort has been to build up men rather than to oppress women. But the effect of reigning in the auxiliaries and of placing them firmly under the direction of the priesthood has been to lessen responsibility and opportunity for women. I don't even want to count the ways. I also believe that the efforts to make progress by wearing pants to church and seeking ordination have not been significant and have only stiffened opposition.

A huge move forward for women—lowering the missionary age for girls—has been a great move for feminism, but it was accomplished purely by the men in suits. And I wish I saw more evidence of thought about what all that additional missionary person power should be doing. What I mostly see in efforts of the feminists of these years is a very sad polarizing of Mormon females as they divide on women's issues. I wish that everyone would recognize and acknowledge that there is a wide spectrum of belief on many issues in the Church and that we can all find a comfortable place for ourselves along that line. We do not have the ability or the right to say that the views of other people are illegitimate because they do not believe as we do. This is why I avoid the use of the "F word" in talks and conversations. I think the term "feminism" is unnecessarily polarizing. While I admit that I personally wear the scarlet F, I do not directly fight the gender wars. I think there are better things to do.

What I say is that women should not ask permission, they should just act. Do women want to give blessings or be blessed by others? Go ahead. Joseph Smith is on record as saying that that is a good thing. You can find it in the first Relief Society Minutes in 1842, now online with the Joseph Smith papers. The major bit reads like this:

> *"Go ye into all the world"— no matter who believeth; these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils should follow all that believe whether male or female. He ask'd the Society if they could not see by this sweeping stroke, that wherein they are ordained, it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority which is confer'd on them—and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let every thing roll on.*

So, if the bishop cannot think of any way to include you in the ceremony on Fast Sunday, bless your baby at home. The husband can bless the baby at church, the wife at home. Invite in your friends for a female celebration. That blessing can still be transcribed and preserved as part of the baby's heritage. So it's not recorded in Church annals. So what? I think women should feel free to bless their sick children, not with consecrated oil, not in the name of the priesthood but a mother's blessing of love and concern addressed to Heavenly Father and asking for His help and care. And should there be an occasion, I think women should feel that they can bless each other. I know a lot of women who have blessed each other.

One of my little crusades at the moment is to get the women into priesthood meeting, just locally. I've told the bishopric several times that I think the Relief Society women should be divided by age as the priesthood is. I say that the young women in our ward know all the answers. We few aged crones want a female group like the high priests for serious thought and discussion. So far, our young bishopric is sympathetic. They agree that it would be a good idea. I am waiting for them to say, well, we'd do it, but there just isn't room in the building, which is true. And in which case I will say, OK, we'll just meet with the high priests. It's just a game I play. I am always trying to push the envelope here and there. I have opened the conversation. People now talk about it. If you can conceive of something to do, you can often bring it to pass.

I think that it is important to do what you want to do, rather than set out to try to change things on top. I don't see any point in writing to high-up Church leaders. They don't want to hear from us. They don't answer our letters. On rare occasions when I can make my points in person, I do that but not in a threatening way.

Would you like to do something like publish *Exponent II*? It can be done. It has been done without specific Church approval and has continued on for two generations. We celebrate that today. Mormon women are there to work with you, help you, and complement your abilities. There are no better people in the world to work with than Mormons. When you ask them, they say yes. Officials may not give permission to do

things, but generally they are not likely to stop you. The last time that the Church directly approached *Exponent II*, that I know of, was very long ago. The Church first asked us to change our legal name from Mormon Sisters, Inc. to something else, which we did. One of the apostles read through the issues that we had published to date in preparation for meeting with us. He concluded, in conservative fashion, that there was nothing to complain about in what we had done, but there was always the fear of what we *might* do. That was a very serious concern. Please note that that terrible fear has not been realized in 40 years of publication. I suppose *Exponent II* might yet do something to justify that concern, but it seems unlikely after 40 years of trial. That doesn't mean that the Church officials approve, but I think most everyone has learned to co-exist.

We are told that we do not need to be directed in all things. Sometimes I ask permission, sometimes I tell people what I am going to do. Sometimes I just act.

One of the leaders who was critical of *Exponent II* in the past warned that we were risking our futures in the Church by making ourselves unacceptable to the leaders. He suggested that in the future there would be wonderful opportunities for women and that we would be tainted and passed over. And there is something to this warning. There is always a price to pay when we take action. I'm still on various lists of forbidden people as I discover from time to time. But I feel good about the projects that I do and don't want to put myself in a position where I can be turned down or shut down. We are told that we do not need to be directed in all things. Sometimes I ask permission, sometimes I tell people what I am going to do. Sometimes I just act.

So I think we can open new space for ourselves in many directions, as individuals and as groups. I have also heard twice, officially, that leaders in the highest places are examining the records to see what Church practices are doctrinally dictated, which are the "unwritten rules of the Church," which are cultural, and which are traditional. The assumption is that, as this information is gathered, the significance of some teachings will be muted. Here is an example of the progress. Does everyone know that it is no longer necessary that sacrament prayers be read perfectly? It's in the new handbook—by not being there. If words are repeated, added, or missing, that's OK as long as the meaning is clear. Yet, I still see boys glancing at the bishop for approval and repeating prayers sometimes. So not everyone knows about this momentous change. The handbook doesn't say that this is a change—it just doesn't say anything. And that's the way that I expect many changes will be sort of snuck into our culture. We do not like to admit that there were ever any problems or mistakes. We will just pretend that it was never otherwise. So what exciting things will we see? The scriptures do say that priests should bless the sacrament, but they say nothing about who should pass it. Is it possible that our Beehive girls will be tapped? Wouldn't that be something?

But I don't think we should just cope with our discomforts at church. I think we should move out in new directions. I always think that it is important to write, record contemporary attitudes, and spread them around as in *Exponent II*. And I think that it is essential to write our own stories, for ourselves, our families, and whoever else. People often ask me why they should write about their own lives when they have no children, when no one is interested and no one is likely to be interested, when it all may be lost anyway, burned up or tossed out. The answer to that is that you do it for yourself. You will live a better, more satisfying life if you think about it and record it. The examined life is a better life. We can write our stories in many media. We should look at experience more broadly.

And one of the major directions we should move toward is art. *Exponent II* has done a wonderful job of locating and featuring excellent female LDS artists. I think we should all do art. We should think how we can express our religious feelings in some tactile form as well as in words. I want us to do a traveling exhibition. All items that can go from place to place in a car and be exhibited in ward buildings or in somebody's house. Art with content, with belief, with edge. What sort of thing do I have in mind?

People do not need to be able to draw to do art. A recent installation at the Phoenix Museum of Art was done by an artist named Angela Ellsworth who says that she "traverses the themes of the body, temporality, social space, and human engagement." The installation was comprised of nine pioneer bonnets displayed on hat racks, recalling the homemade sunbonnets worn by pioneer women, specifically here the nine wives of Mormon prophet Lorenzo Snow, Ellsworth's great, great-grandfather and the sixth president of the Church. I hunted around for a list of Snow's wives and did find one. In the Church Almanac I noted that polygamous wives of the Church presidents are not listed or even numbered. Church presidents' wives are not listed until monogamous George Albert Smith, when names and numbers of children are listed and serial multiple wives by date. Polygamous wives are not listed by name or number for the first seven presidents of the Church. Those wives are just some of our unnamed and unremembered. But in her work, Ellsworth re-imagines a community of women with their own visionary and revelatory powers—pioneering new personal histories and narratives.

Each bonnet was decorated with a different design. What is dramatic, unexpected, and unsettling is that the designs are "drawn" by inserting thousands of pearl headed hat pins in slightly different shades of white and off-white. The pins cover the surface of each bonnet, the sharp points pointing inside and inserted all the way down the ribbon streamers. The designs are similar but unique. Ellsworth says of them that "They are beautiful and demure as well as unexpected and confrontational."

What could the artist have had in mind with this piece? If art induces emotion, how does this make you feel? What does it say? This is Mormon art communicating feelings and information. I'm very glad to see Mormon art. Not just sweet images of beautiful Jesus figures. Not just pioneers, beautiful families, and pictures of temples. I want ideas, information, content, opinions, and more. As my concluding act, I want to submit another impressive work of art, just full of content.

In 1976 a wall hanging was presented to me by my *Exponent II* sisters when I resigned as editor of the paper. It is as rich a piece of artwork as anyone could find. And like all of our projects, it was a group effort.

The construction and creation was by Carolyn Person, then known as Carolyn Peters. Her initials down here stand for Carolyn Widstoe Durham Peters, her well-known Church heritage. But she decided that she was a person in her own right and took on that name. Carolyn's iconic artwork adorns all the early efforts of our Boston group.

The wall hanging is approximately 39" wide by 80" long, representing a stylized tree topped by a beehive, and crowned with a rainbow. It's made up of positive images, happy things looking forward, though it was created at a kind of difficult and dark time. The piece is covered in scriptures and sayings, one of my favorites being the women's paradox that "If you keep up, you'll never get ahead."

So here is a work of art, beautiful, meaningful, aspirational, witty, and one which projects a background, a community, and a way of life. It's like a portrait without having to look at your face. It could be my obituary. It is a loving portrait painted by friends. I hang it in my front hall and see it everyday, always reminded of those great *Exponent II* days and of the women I love and worked with. Everyone should have a meaningful compilation of scripture, favorite sayings, and symbols at close hand. We need to be reminded of what is important and meaningful to keep us in line.

This piece is a constant reminder to me of days when we thought we could do anything and we did do a considerable amount. It says to me that we did not only produce printed items of some interest to others, but we built lasting friendships, cooperating and working together. We had a woman's world within our family worlds, our Church worlds, and our neighborhood worlds. It was a productive world, and it was good.

So I say to all: do good, do well.

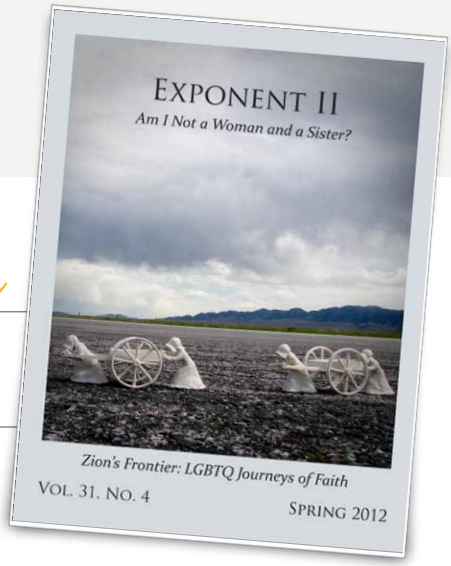
EXPONENT II REVISITED PICK:
SELECTED BY EMILY CLYDE CURTIS, MANAGING EDITOR 2009-PRESENT

In the spring of 2012, Aimee Evan Hickman and I published the LGBTQ-themed issue of *Exponent II*. The pain and heartbreak shared eloquently by so many was transformative for me as a Mormon and as a feminist. I saw how queer Mormon women are hit doubly in our Church by patriarchy and heteronormativity. I saw that I was living a paradox, espousing love for my LGBTQ sisters and brothers while not actively doing anything to ensure that they enjoyed the same rights I have. I had sat by, wringing my hands while my state voted on Proposition 102 at the same time California voted on Proposition 8 about marriage equality. That issue of *Exponent II* made me a better ally, but when Aimee asked for an essay that had special meaning for me, it wasn't one from that issue.

It was from the issue that came after the LGBTQ issue came out. As heterosexual and cis women, what was our role in sharing queer women's stories? Would queer women continue to submit their stories?

Kelly Montgomery submitted her essay, talking about her excommunication for being a lesbian when she was nineteen. But she also talks about how that excommunication shaped her and helped her grow as a Mormon, how she and her partner have chosen to raise their four children in the Church and what that experience is like for them.

I'm proud of that issue of *Exponent II* and the submissions of queer women and men since that issue. I hope that *Exponent II* will continue to grow in representing the voices of those women who face intersectionalism whether through race, gender, or sexual identity.



A New Kind of Pioneer

By Kelly Montgomery
Vol. 32 No. 1 Summer 2012

My heart sank when I saw the envelope from the president of the Auburn Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My hands trembled and I held my breath as I read those black words on that white paper: "Bishop's court."

I was 19 years old. I am 43 now. I never went to the Bishop's court, but my family did. They provided the evidence needed to excommunicate me because I was a lesbian.

I have never been ashamed of my excommunication. I have been hurt, angry, indifferent, and glad, depending on where I was in my life. Over the past several years, I have been humbly proud.

My story isn't much different from other lesbian Mormons, except, perhaps, that my partner and I are very much out and also very active in our ward in Washington. My partner and I have four kids ranging in age from seventeen months to sixteen years old. Our Sunday mornings are no different from any other member's Sunday mornings…hectically wrangling kids so we can be on time to church.

I want to say that we are pioneers. I tell myself this before the sacrament prayers every week when I try to find that place in my heart where I feel close to my Savior. I cannot take the sacrament, but as I listen to those sacred prayers, I covenant with my Father in Heaven that, in the

upcoming week, I will "take upon me the name of thy Son" and "always remember him" and how even though I'm gay, Jesus Christ shed his blood for me. I think about how I can remember him as I'm going about my days, at work and with my partner and kids, and I renew my belief that his spirit will be with me if I truly try. I watch others place the bread on their tongues and tip their heads back while partaking of the water. Sometimes I can't help but wonder if they know how fortunate they are to be able to engage in such a sacred and wonderful ordinance.

As I sit in Gospel Doctrine and Relief Society, I often reflect on how I would cherish the privilege of being able to teach a lesson or say a prayer or bear my testimony. There have been so many times when I've felt that fire burning in my spirit where my legs nearly lifted me off the bench and propelled me forward to share my sincere beliefs with my brothers and sisters during a fast and testimony meeting. In February 2011, our son was blessed during sacrament meeting. How I longed to hold him in my arms and express from the pulpit my love for my Father in Heaven, my Elder Brother, my partner and my precious children. I wished to bear testimony that I believe in personal revelation because I knew from the first time I saw our sweet little boy that he was meant to be my child, even though I had not birthed him.

How I long to pay tithing and fast offerings. How I wish for a calling. Yet, my partner and I serve where we're allowed. We make a lot of meals for missionaries and for members who are sick or recovering from childbirth. I'm a lawyer, so I often give legal advice to those in need. It isn't nearly enough, though. My heart longs to serve.

I am happy to say that we have been treated pretty kindly by the membership in our ward. We have never hidden our relationship. I think the majority of the members in our ward see that our family is really not very different from their own families—we love our kids, we pray together, we have Family Home Evening, our kids go to mutual and seminary, and we have a lovely home where we do our best to live the gospel. Some may believe that we don't live the gospel because we defy the Church's position on homosexuality. That is an interesting conversation. My partner and I are registered domestic partners. We're as married as we can be.

"I wish the prophet could sit down with my family during dinner and spend a little time with us. The prophet seems to be so wise, so loving, and caring; I believe he would leave our humble home feeling the spirit that is here."

I wish the prophet could sit down with my family during dinner and spend a little time with us. The prophet seems to be so wise, so loving, and caring; I believe he would leave our humble home feeling the spirit that is here. It is a spirit of love and teaching, forgiveness, and repentance, acceptance and striving. He would see our kids thriving and happy, and a loving and committed relationship between two women who adore each other and work hard at raising a successful family.

Lately, I have been humbly proud about my excommunication. One might ask, "why?" The simple answer is that being a non-member has made me a better Mormon. I can't take anything for granted, from the simplest act of service to the most complex parenting challenge. I don't know what the hereafter holds for my partner and me, but my prayers in that regard have been answered. I don't need to know the details, because the soft whisperings of the Spirit tell me I'm okay and that we will be okay. It is an interesting perspective for me because, as a lawyer, I always act as an advocate for something. The Savior is *my* advocate. We are blessed as a family every day and even though my membership has been taken away, I do not believe that the Holy Ghost has left me.

I am a pioneer. I probably will not have anything to do with great worldwide understanding or acceptance of gay Mormon families, but I might have an impact on the person who sits in the pew behind me, and I know I have an impact on my children.

Excerpt from *Illuminating Ladies* by Molly Cannon Hadfield • Provo, Utah

The Next 40 Years of Mormon Feminism

We inherited from Joseph Smith an arrested restoration on matters of gender, with elements of the endowment ceremony and Smith's own remarks to the Navuoo Relief Society indicating that he saw women as heirs to priesthood but never quite realizing that vision before his martyrdom in 1844. This complicated and unfinished theological business concerning gender belongs to us.

Delivered by Joanna Brooks in Greenfield, New Hampshire • September 13, 2014

I was not yet born when the women who published *A Beginner's Boston* met at Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's house in Boston to talk about their lives, launching the organized contemporary Mormon feminist movement. There were no Mormon feminists in my world—none at least that I knew of. Not until Eugene England walked into the classroom where I sat for my August 1989 orientation at Brigham Young University did I know there could be such a thing as a Mormon feminist. But since then I have been fed, sheltered, warmed, and

nurtured by Mormon feminist communities that were created and tended by women working long before my arrival. I feel an enormous debt of gratitude and a sense of honor in being part of this important work with all of you. I am here to say thank you to the women who built this movement, our spiritual home.

I am sensitive that we are here in the wake of yet another difficult moment in Mormon feminist history. It's a moment that reminds me of a letter from March 1979, from the Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum, an association of older Mormon feminists in Provo, Utah, expressing dismay about anti-feminism within the Church to LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball:

> *Dear President Kimball:*
>
> *We speak for a sizeable minority of LDS women whose pain is so acute that they must try to be heard. Does the First Presidency really know of our plight? We cannot believe that anyone deliberately seeks to destroy us; nevertheless that is the signal we are receiving. We feel that we are the victims of a deliberate and punishing ultra-conservative squeeze to force us out of fellowship. Suddenly many devoted Mormon women are being treated like apostates. . . We desperately need to know whether, after serious consideration, soul-searching, and prayer, you indeed and in fact find us unworthy, a minority open to attack, and ultimately expendable. If not, can the word get out that Mormon feminists are not to be subjected to intimidations, rejection for Church assignments, loss of employment, and psychological excommunication? Every difference of opinion or sincere question should not be answered with a threatening indictment of one's testimony. We are women who love the Lord, the Gospel, and the Church; we have served, tithed, and raised righteous children in Zion. We plead for the opportunity to continue to do so in an atmosphere of respect and justice. For decades we have been part of the solution, whatever the need has been; we are saddened to be now considered part of the problem.*[1]

It was a letter that some of us feel we could have written in September 1993, or June 2014. The familiarity of this letter—its sentiments, its plaintiveness—could be taken as an indicator of how little has changed for Mormon feminism in the last few decades. I've been struck time and time again by the persistence of Mormon feminism's core challenges and questions. Can we measure change? Will Mormon feminism always find itself engaged in a cyclical series of repressions and recoveries? Cycles of retrenchment may never end, but the contexts in which we experience them certainly do. Whoever could have imagined in 1970 the rise of the Internet, let alone its impacts, for better and for worse, on Mormonism and the Mormon feminist movement? Thanks to the great feminist tool that is Facebook, we who once may have felt ourselves isolated in our wards can find virtual communities of Mormon feminists on the Internet. We once relied on hand-mimeographed newsletters sent quarterly by snail mail. Now, we repost links to Mormon feminist or progressive blogposts, hit "like" buttons, share, and comment, all in real time. As dazzling as this virtual community is, the Internet has also served as a new platform for the expression of anti-feminism, straining friends and family networks and creating a new warrant for surveillance of Mormon feminists. Then there is the dizzying sense of amnesia and inertia one gets from the constant scrolling of the news feed, every day bringing newcomers with entry-level feminist awakenings—vital, crucial, necessary, to be sure—but also no sense of history, no anchor points in collective memory and experience.

"There is the dizzying sense of amnesia and inertia one gets from the constant scrolling of the news feed, every day bringing newcomers with entry-level feminist awakenings—vital, crucial, necessary, to be sure—but also no sense of history, no anchor points in collective memory and experience."

Now is the time to honor the 40-year legacy of this movement by taking steps to preserve and convey our own Mormon feminist history. Only by looking at our history can we gain perspective on our shared and

individual experience and develop strategic insights to set priorities for our future. I would like to take this opportunity to present you with the product of my own historical reflection by identifying what I believe are some key challenges the Mormon feminist movement should and must face in its next 40 years.

1. MORMON FEMINISM NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO PRESS MORMON THEOLOGY FORWARD.

I often explain to my colleagues in the progressive religious community the profoundly democratic character of Mormon theology—that we have no trained clergy, no seminarians, no professional theologians, and no theological seminars. Still, I am deeply impressed by the significant theological work Mormon feminists have accomplished. We inherited from Joseph Smith an *arrested restoration* on matters of gender, with elements of the endowment ceremony and Smith's own remarks to the Navuoo Relief Society indicating that he saw women as heirs to priesthood but never quite realizing that vision before his martyrdom in 1844. This complicated and unfinished theological business concerning gender belongs to us. If the debate over priesthood has revealed anything, it is that theology—especially Mormonism's theological history—is not well understood and not well-regarded by leadership and laity alike. Historical theology has not been used by our leaders as a resource in addressing contemporary issues. We know that the 20th century rise of the bureaucratic Church brought with it a flattening, simplification, and de-historicization of Mormon theology. Our movement knows that the history of our faith's teachings on gender is far more complicated than most Mormons realize. We must preserve this body of knowledge. We must make sure Mormon feminist writing stays accessible—especially longer, more nuanced arguments that may not find their way to blog posts.

2. MORMON FEMINISM NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO NOURISH THE INSTITUTIONS THAT PRESERVE OUR LEGACY AND CREATE OUR FUTURE.

This is a crucial time to check the health of our major institutions, to attend to their foundations and safeguard their futures. The importance of this is underscored by the fact that we are not yet in a place where we can count on even historically progressive Mormon institutions to offer equal opportunity to Mormon women. Mormon women are vastly underrepresented in Mormon Studies.

There are many reasons why. During the 1970s and 1980s, LDS Church leaders openly discouraged Mormon women from pursuing professional lives in general, let alone seeking opportunities for professional religious study and teaching. The categorical exclusion of women from most LDS Church leadership positions further constricts opportunities for women to produce and publish lay theology. Mormon feminist historians and theologians have always worked as independent scholars. Some have pursued successful academic careers in the humanities and social sciences, but their accomplishments as Mormon theologians and the impact of their writings on sizeable Mormon audiences is rarely acknowledged within their universities. Most have no opportunities to teach Mormon feminist thought in an institutional setting. Those who have managed to write about Mormonism from a feminist perspective have found themselves facing reprisals. To younger Mormon women bold enough to consider a career, Mormon feminist intellectual work seemed an endeavor rife with personal and professional risks and few opportunities and rewards.

For all of these reasons, Mormon feminist theology, scholarship, and writing has happened almost entirely through painstaking, uncompensated, independent grassroots efforts. Even today it happens not primarily in academic books or scholarly journals but rather on blogs and podcasts. Mormon feminist intellectual gatherings typically do not take place in university-based conferences but independent community symposia or retreats. Mormon feminist theorizing happens in hallway conversations at church and in between "regular" sessions at professional conferences like the Mormon History Association; it happens in our kitchens, in our cars, on social media, and quite often with children and grandchildren on our laps and at our ankles. Our archives are in cardboard boxes in our garages, attics, and, when we have them, offices. As a reflection of our circumstances, Mormon feminist thought and writing tends to have a distinctly accessible and vernacular character.

"Mormon feminist theology, scholarship, and writing has happened almost entirely through painstaking, uncompensated, independent grassroots efforts. Even today it happens not primarily in academic books or scholarly journals but rather on blogs and podcasts."

While the grassroots character of Mormon feminism is something to be celebrated, its lack of institutional support raises concerns about the preservation and continuity of Mormon feminist thought. Many younger feminists have little exposure to the writings of our foresisters. Older Mormon feminists have sometimes cycled out of activity in the LDS Church, leaving younger feminists without the benefit of older women's wisdom and perspective. Consequently, it seems that each new wave of young Mormon women comes of age into the great questions of Mormon feminism with few firm points of reference, each one reprising for itself the debates of the past. Now is the time to document our history, to identify major collections of papers and digitize them or make sure that they are designated for reliable archives, to conduct endowment campaigns for our major institutions with 501c3s, to help those who are not 501c3s become so, to think about the needs of younger feminists and how to prepare for the new generation.

3. MORMON FEMINISM NEEDS TO PRESS FORWARD IN ADDRESSING RACIAL DIFFERENCES AND BUILD ALLIANCES WITH WOMEN OF COLOR.

Writing in 1995, Cecilia Konchar Farr offered a loving critique of the insularity of Mormon feminist retreat culture, which, she wrote, fostered

> *A feminism based on individual liberation, where meetings consisted mainly of entertainment, affirmation, and sharing stories.*
>
> *A homogeneous feminism that seemed, for the most part, comfortable in its familiar surroundings.*
>
> *An insular feminism that based its desires for change almost solely on getting male leaders to understand women in the church.*
>
> *A non-theoretical feminism, whose major premise was that women should no longer be silent.*
>
> *An apolitical feminism that saw most of the women resisting a pull into a mild protest campaign.*
>
> *It was a feminism in the wilderness or focused on reform, and a feminism that highlighted all of the imperfections of our smaller group--our homogeneity, our middle-class consciousness, our insularity.*

And our whiteness as well. It is important to note women in our tradition who have been anti-racist activists and feminists, like Maida Rust Withers, Cecilia Farr, Gloria Cronin, and Margaret Young. But we have much work left to do. Renewed attention to women's ordination has yielded many comparisons between the 1978 end of the racist priesthood and temple ban and the situation of women in the LDS Church. These casual comparisons have provoked a significant reaction from African-American Mormons. Black Mormon women have been especially frustrated with the use of Jane Manning James, an early Black LDS pioneer, as an emblem for the women's ordination struggle. They have voiced their deep frustration with having Jane's story put to work for another movement without having been understood and honored on its own terms; changed to serve our purposes without us having been changed by the story. It is very important that we recognize the intersectional character of racial experience and not simply appropriate African-American experience in Mormonism as a legend for feminist struggles.

This summer at Feminist Mormon Girls Camp we held a session on race and Mormonism. Several women of color attended, including one prominent Black Mormon blogger who is not openly feminist identified but has friends within our community. The dialogue we had in that session was honest, productive, and deeply positive. White women were told that we needed to do a much better job creating allies with women of color in the Church, a much better job showing up for other people's

struggles as if they were our own, calling out injustice in any form, even when we were not the victims. White women in attendance listened hard and began to sense the outlines of our own lack of knowledge. We realized that Mormon feminism had done what the Church had, centering around white North American members and their concerns. We realized that there are whole other cultural systems of gender hierarchy that intersect with Mormonism in its diverse communities. Women of color gently challenged us on the way we try to keep our spaces "safe" by minimizing disagreement. "Safe for whom?" they asked. "I have to be uncomfortable all the time. If your being a bit uncomfortable makes it safer for me, are you willing to go there?" they asked.

They also challenged us gently on the methods of the priesthood ordination movement. "I was baptized by my grandma who was a Pentecostal minister. And I carry my own oil. I don't . . . *ask*. Why do you ask for permission? It only allows them to say no." They conveyed that to women of color much of our movement looked like white women asking for something from white men. It did not go deep enough, as the brilliant Maori Mormon womanist blogger Gina Colvin has observed, unless we were willing to criticize the exclusionary and unjust quality of Church hierarchy. And we realized through our conversation that we could not simply invite women of color into our familiar spaces and call it racial reconciliation. We needed to create new spaces, third spaces, where we could gather, learn each other's stories and histories, and identify the places where the needs of our community touched.

4. WE NEED TO DEVELOP OUR PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE.

During the last two years, I have become aware of how many women in our community desperately need a college degree or a bit more education to connect to work opportunities they hunger for or actually need. We have not yet outlived the shadow of President Ezra Taft Benson's "To the Mothers in Zion" talk of 1987. Those of us who have created our own career paths know not only the satisfaction that work can bring but also the confidence, independence, and the freedom of conscience that come when you have your own financial footing. Work can also transform the way we experience gender, especially if we have been brought up in the very specifically gendered world of Mormonism and find ourselves in spaces where our authority is connected to ability.

Given that many Mormon women do not have their own incomes, ours is a largely unfunded undertaking. Thrift, self-reliance, resourcefulness, generosity, personal hospitality, and volunteerism are the lifeblood of our movement. Since pioneer times many generations of Mormon women have managed the challenges of raising large families (or caring for entire congregations or building religious traditions) with limited resources. We are used to doing much with little, and the Mormon feminist movement has continued this tradition. We run blogs and maintain online movements from our kitchen tables after our households are asleep. I am proud of this Mormon feminist tradition, our hard work, our hardiness, and our resilience. But as Lorie Winder Stromberg and Meghan Raynes have reminded us in classic essays about power, there is nothing wrong with wanting power. Our movement needs power.

"There is nothing wrong with wanting power. Our movement needs power."

5. WE NEED TO DEVELOP OUR PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE AS WELL.

I think back on the letter written by the women of the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum, and then I think of the gentle challenge at Mormon Feminist Girls Camp: "Why do you ask?" Sisters, why do we ask? Why do we ask if we are worthy? Why do we ask if we are expendable? Why do we seek approval? Why do we ask for protection? It has not come. It may never come. I wish it were otherwise. I believe we deserve better. I believe God wants better for us. But the asking orients our movement in particular ways that our own history shows to be of dubious benefit to women's leadership and autonomy. Let us remember the profound lesson of Linda King Newell's essay "A Gift Given, A Gift Taken Away": it was when Mormon women started asking, seeking approval from Church hierarchy to give blessings of healing and before childbirth, that's when

the power was lost. We will not find equality by waiting for approval from headquarters. We must find our leadership within ourselves, in our relationship to God, and in taking responsibility for meeting the needs of our people.

"We will not find equality by waiting for approval from headquarters. We must find our leadership within ourselves, in our relationship to God, and in taking responsibility for meeting the needs of our people."

I think of Lowell Bennion's favorite saying, from the Bhagavad Gita, "To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits." The fruits of our feminist labors must not be measured in terms of our ability to move a few powerful men in the Church Office Building, or gather information about them, or work our privileged connections to them, or make them in any way the object of our focus. They have their work to do; let us do ours. Let us turn instead to our sisters, our mothers, our daughters—worldwide, of every color. What are the issues that connect Mormon women across class and continent? Where are we vulnerable? Where are lives precarious? What are our needs? There is leadership to be claimed in naming and organizing around those needs and identifying and criticizing the exclusionary power structures that have created them. That independence of vision, that resilience in the face of what will surely be continuing cycles of retrenchment, must be our charge for the next 40 years. That is prophetic leadership. With or without approval. With or without ordination.

I would like to see us all take the lessons from these historical cycles and deepen our resilience, becoming more shockproof and less innocent about Mormon history or about how powerful institutions work and what they will do. Mormon feminism has needed, created, and guarded safe spaces defined by loyalty and mutual protection. Perhaps in our maturity our safe spaces can also become places where we cultivate a wisdom born out of critical reflection on ourselves, our movement, and our methods.

We must continue to build because we know that our work will be needed in years to come. This beautiful and powerful faith will continue to generate young women of strength, vision, and moral courage—young women who are passionately attached to the truths we find in Mormon theology, the Book of Mormon and the examples of our ancestors and to the unabashedly improbable beauty of our angels, our pioneers, our desert Zion, and yet who crash headlong into Mormonism's unresolved gender conflicts, its inexcusable narrowness, and the contemptible poverty of spirit with which it often treats its most powerful women.

I am proud that we have acted with such resilience in the face of another round of excommunications. I know that if we continue to reflect on our own writings, our own history, our own lessons, we will have a strong foundation for 40 years to come.

We know that the challenges of faith—encountered from without and within—put us each on different paths. Some of us stay, covering what we know until it is safe to acknowledge it once again. Some of us find ourselves infiltrated with a sense of sadness or loss that is hard to relieve. Some of us move on, seeking new ways to express our faith. The strength of our movement is that as Mormon feminists we have a bond, a personal sense of solidarity and affection, that holds us through all the challenges a life of faith can bring and can hold us even as we reflect critically on who we have been and who we must become. I feel that bond here with you all tonight. 40 years in and 40 years out, this may be our movement's greatest legacy.

NOTES:

[1] Amy Bentley, "Comforting the Motherless Children: The Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23.40 (1990), 50.

DISCOVERING THE *EXPONENT* // SISTERHOOD

I still very much considered myself a woman of great faith. But I was also a woman watching my husband struggle and grapple with questions and doubts—questions and doubts that before another year was out, I would find myself also experiencing in a much deeper, even painful way than I ever imagined. | Amy Isaksen Cartwright • Calgary, Alberta Canada

I came across *The Exponent* blog late one Saturday night while preparing to teach a Relief Society lesson. I loved this calling and would often spend hours poring over the lesson manuals and searching the scriptures for new and refreshing ways to approach subjects that can all too easily become rote repetitions on tired themes. Normally, I felt confident in my ability to teach directly from the manual and to ask thought-provoking questions, but for this particular lesson I was left stumped and even hurting. The lesson was from the George Albert Smith manual, Chapter 17: The Strengthening Power of Faith.

I was a woman full of faith and hope in the Gospel. I loved the Church and considered my membership in it one of my greatest blessings. While I had concerns and questions, mostly about some of the Church's political actions, I still very much considered myself a woman of great faith. I was able to put my questions on the proverbial shelf and continue along happily. But I was also a woman watching my husband struggle and grapple with questions and doubts—questions and doubts that before another year was out, I would find myself also experiencing in a much deeper, even painful way than I ever imagined. In a lot of ways, this lesson was the catalyst. Two tiny paragraphs changed things forever.

> *Our faith is conditioned upon our righteous lives. We cannot live improperly and have faith as we should, but if we keep the commandments of the Lord, we can have faith, and it will grow and increase as our righteousness increases.*
>
> *If there are any of us who lack faith in this work it is because we have not kept the commandments of God. If there are any who do not know that this is the work of our Father, it is because they have not done their duty. I know as I know that I live that this is the Lord's work, and that knowledge comes as a result of keeping His commandments.*

As I read these words, I recognized them as the first time that I wholeheartedly disagreed with a president of the Church on a doctrinal matter. I was watching my own husband grapple with questions and doubts and I had also watched him make incredible sacrifices for his faith. I knew that while he was not perfect, he was a very righteous man who strove to keep the

"*WXY Zed*" by Denise Gasser • Vancouver, British Columbia

commandments and desired connection with God. This statement so blatantly flew in the face of my own personal experiences. I was at a loss as to how to approach this subject in my lesson.

And so I began to search for helps on this lesson, something that would put this quote into better context or reframe the sentiment so as to allow my own personal experiences and observations to still align with the teachings of a prophet of God. When I stumbled across *The Exponent* blog's Relief Society lessons, I found something that I didn't expect: I found a Mormon woman who acknowledged her disagreement. She just said it and owned it without apology while also drawing on inspiring examples and teachings from the scriptures.

I had never encountered anything like this. To this point in my life, I had approached the Gospel as an all-or-nothing package deal. You agree with the words of the prophets (and by extension, the Church manuals) or you don't. If you do agree, you're following God. If you don't agree, you're following Satan. Questions about women's visibility and lack of institutional power had never entered into my mind. Consideration of women's perspectives had seemed like a petty grab for power. But in that one short post, I found a woman who had made a voice for herself, who had said, "I am a Mormon woman. I love the Lord…but I have questions. I have concerns. I even have doubts. And what's more is that I'm going to give them voice and space." My black-and-white paradigm took a severe hit that night, but instead of fighting it, my heart had been touched and I felt this incredible relief at the experience of vulnerability and authenticity.

As I presented my lesson the next day, I found myself sharing concerns and even openly disagreeing with this teaching from the Relief Society manual. It was terrifying! A few of the younger sisters worked up the courage to share their stories of doubts, but others seemed baffled that I would encourage such conversations *out-loud*. It was the first time that I realized in such a visceral way that perhaps my ward Relief Society was not the place to have these conversations. Perhaps it was not safe.

Questions beget questions and I soon found myself longing to discuss the more complicated issues surrounding faith and the journeys that it takes us on. Church meetings and associations were for sharing uplifting, faith-promoting stories and for restating words that had come before through sanctioned sources, almost exclusively the voices of men. There did not seem to be room for asking the questions that have no answers, the questions that are such a part of our being that they need space to dwell or they will overcome us. There was no room for the stories of women in our church materials and teachings unless they aligned with the teachings and purposes of men in positions of power. There was no room for the concerns that were pulling on my heart, but that I had never allowed space or voice. And so, I needed to find other sources and places to have these conversations and continue to taste of the forbidden fruit of vulnerability.

As a fairly new Mormon feminist, my search for "home" has largely been online through Facebook groups and blogs, but there was something about that very first copy of *Exponent II*, the temple edition, that grounded me in my quest for that safe space I so greatly desired. I read of the varied experiences and emotions Mormon women have felt, and continue to feel, around the temple. In each of their stories I was able to see a piece of myself—the pain, the joy, the questions, the peace. It confirmed that Mormon womanhood was not about a singular ideal but a tapestry of all-too-human stories and emotions, each informing one another, knit together to create wholeness.

My life and faith have taken a much different turn than I anticipated the night that I came across EmilyCC's post about faith and doubt. Sometimes I mourn the ease and simplicity of that black-and-white worldview when all the questions had answers and my life was measurable against one true standard of womanhood. But most of the time I am grateful to share in the search for authentic self, hand-in-hand with my sisters across time and space. While at times it is a complicated and even a painful act of discovery, it is here that I have found home—in myself, with my God, with my sisters.

EXPONENT II REVISITED PICK:
SELECTED BY CARREL SHELDON, A FOUNDING MOTHER OF *EXPONENT II*

An article that I've thought of over the years was written by Cheryl Howard (now DiVito) about a woman who treats herself to a cruise and eats cheese and crackers in her cabin every day to save up to afford dinner in the dining room the last night. Of course, in the end, she discovers that all the meals were included in her fare. I have a lurking fear of being that ignorant of something that might make all the difference if only I had known...

Cheese and Crackers

By Cheryl Howard • Vol. 11 No. 4. Summer 1985

(This essay has been edited for length.)

When I was growing up and had to give two-and-a-half minute talks in church, I sometimes resorted to padding my own brief ideas with stories or poems from one of those compact little books called something like *Golden Nuggets of Thought* or *Thoughts for Talks*. Their table of contents promised anecdotes for everything from anger to zeal. The books themselves were small enough that in my youthful naivét, I thought that I could mask one with a few loose papers so that the congregation wouldn't necessarily have to know that most of the talk came prefabricated from one quick source—just add tears. And I did shed many a sincere tear over those tender stories that were geared to the strum of the heartstrings. But as the years pass and I hear these stories time and again—usually from teenagers who distrust the notion that the best experience is one's own—familiarity breeds contempt. I squirm in my foreknowledge of what happened to the second pair of footsteps in the sand, or I wish that the violin strings were missing in "The Touch of the Master's Hand."

I have to admit, however, that there is one story that continues to haunt me. A woman allegedly scrimps and saves for years and is finally able to go on a cruise. She calculates that if she limits herself to cheese and crackers in her cabin on the ship she will even have enough money to pay for one meal in the main dining room. After indulging in this dinner on the last night of the cruise, she inquires of the steward where she should pay the bill. Somewhat confused, he replies, "But, madam, the price of the meals is included in your ticket." The woman had focused so hard on scrimping and saving that she was unaware that she had the right to so much more.

At sixteen or seventeen, I trembled to think that I, too, was leading a cheese-and-crackers existence. Even now, I take stock to see if I have my nose stuck in *Life on $5 a Day*, while the more knowledgeable are reading *Fodor's Guide to Luxury*.

I have reason for my suspicions; even with a good teaching job and money in the bank, I still live in the bargain basement. When shopping for clothes I find myself muttering, "Ha! I could make that for less than half." Then, with my adrenaline high, I spend two hours in the fabric store, three hours scheming how to lay and cut out the pattern (I always buy less fabric than what is called for—everybody knows that the pattern companies are in cahoots with the fabric mills), and two nights sewing the dress. One of my non-sewing friends once pointed out to me that if I had to pay myself for the time that I spent sewing, the dress would probably cost less if I bought it. I pushed back what hair I had left, squinted at her through bloodshot eyes, and told her that my sewing was purely recreational, an artistic outlet.

I suppose that I wouldn't feel that this frame of mind was so insidious if

it ended with shopping. I could label it "being frugal" or "shopping smart" and pat myself on the back for getting the best of a bargain, but my scrimp-and-save mania even pervades vacations.

Last summer, I became bent on proving that I was not a cheese-and-crackers person, that I could indulge in life. I signed my husband, Bob, and me up for a trip to Greece that included a three-day cruise. Admittedly, I chose the cheapest tour available, but I figured that a tour was a step in the right direction. At least I could avoid missing half of the countryside while trying to figure out how to bypass toll roads and the shoulder bag droop that comes from carrying extra rations because I knew that most meals were furnished. The basics were taken care of, but it was the shopping that did us in.

Greece is one of those countries where one is expected to haggle. Now for the uninitiated, haggling might seem a comparison shopper's dream. It is a nightmare. Who knows how much less the little shop down the street might charge? Will I get a better deal if I pay in dollars, drachmas, or use Mastercard? Would I get a better price in Corinth or in Delphi? What does the tour book advise? How much time before the bus leaves?

Then I received *the sign*. I haven't quite figured out the interpretation yet—I just know that it is significant. It came on our last night aboard the cruise ship. Usually we dined on deck at the smörgåsbord, but for the final night everyone was expected to attend the captain's formal farewell dinner. Late that afternoon, however, it became evident that guests were foregoing the festivities because of increasingly rough seas. Bob and I lay on our bunks for about an hour before we decided not to attend. We didn't feel sick, but we weren't willing to risk feeling awful later by going to the dinner. I was lying there trying to reconstruct the rescue scene from *The Poseidon Adventure* when I heard a knock at the door. I'm sure that the staff thought that they were doing us a kindness by sending a steward around with snacks for those of us not at dinner, but what he proffered drew me up short—cheese and crackers.

At this point, I get muddled trying to ascertain the exact significance of this incident. Does it indicate that I will always be cursed with this pinch-penny mentality? Or is it a curse? Maybe the incident emphasizes the fact that a cheese-and-crackers existence is a firm foundation that will provide strength in times of stress. Maybe I have cut through the excesses of life to find a *Truth*.

"The story of the woman saving for the cruise is unsettling because the woman does not realize that she is entitled to more. Her scrimping to pay for the trip is laudatory, but her ignorance of her rights is painful."

In my more lucid moments, I realize that I have shied away from the more obvious interpretation of the original story. Frugality is irrelevant; ignorance is the focus. The story of the woman saving for the cruise is unsettling because the woman does not realize that she is entitled to more. Her scrimping to pay for the trip is laudatory, but her ignorance of her rights is painful. The story haunts me because this woman is a victim of ignorance. She gets less than what she already paid for. Now if anything could upset a scrimp-and-saver like me, that's it. And no matter how much sympathy I want to give that woman, I cannot forgive her for not knowing. Why didn't she read the brochures more carefully? Why didn't she ask?
It's even worse when I try to deal with the spiritual interpretation. How much enlightenment and how many spiritual blessings have I missed because of my own ignorance? The admonitions are there; "ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." We have been promised "…line upon line, precept upon precept," based on our readiness and our *asking*.

I can judge my spiritual awareness by noticing how many blessings come as complete surprises. A prime example is when the Priesthood was given to black males. Even though I counted a black woman among my best friends, I am ashamed to think how little asking of the Lord I did. The price for salvation has already been paid. It is the price of ignorance that appalls me. I may be dining on cheese and crackers while others are eating steak.

The Radical Mission of EXPONENT II

Throughout its history, Exponent II *has sought to expand the definition of a faithful Mormon woman, not by challenging people's faith, but by validating women's lives which both adhere to and diverge from idealized cultural narratives of Mormon womanhood.*

Delivered by Aimee Evans Hickman in Cambridge, Massachusetts • September 12, 2014

In response to a recent fundraiser, we received a generous $100 donation from one of our readers along with the following note: "Hoping you'll get a bit more radical." As *Exponent II* commences (what I hope will be at least) another 40 years of sharing women's experiences, this comment hints at how the question of *Exponent II*'s role in the larger discussion of Mormon women's issues is still as open to debate as it might have been 40 years ago.

When *Exponent II* was first conceived, its focus was not just in preserving women's voices but also in a radical project to engage them in difficult discussions while freeing them from the kinds of faith-promoting narratives that too often turn dynamic, personal experiences into static devotional objects all their own. The concept to "publish this paper as a *living* history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women," was in part a radical act to counter cultural platitudes and pieties about Mormon femininity that dominate so many of our correlated materials and reduce dynamic personal experiences into static devotional objects all their own. Throughout its history, *Exponent II* has sought to expand the definition of a faithful Mormon woman, not by challenging people's faith, but by validating women's lives which both adhere to and diverge from idealized cultural narratives of Mormon womanhood. By exploring the way Mormon women grapple with their faith when life doesn't fit prescribed expectations or when the Church fails to live up to its own standards, *Exponent II* writers have been able to shift from viewing alternative life paths or Church failings as merely *liabilities* in their spiritual journey, to *embracing* those experiences in order to better understand the full picture of Mormon womanhood. Rather than seeing these detours and disappointments as events that women must simply use their faith to overcome, *Exponent II* has always endeavored to be a forum where diverse life-experiences and perspectives could be honestly shared, mourned, and celebrated.

The valorization of differing perspectives and life choices available to Mormon women anchors *Exponent II* in a feminist tradition which prioritizes the moral agency of women while giving full expression to women's voices. This broad scope offers some measure

of validation to both those who are comforted by and struggle with being women in a patriarchal world and institution. Such free expression has also given *Exponent II* writers license to examine topics often considered too radical or taboo for most official Church publications, including subjects like abortion, LGBTQ issues, the Equal Rights Amendment, Church discipline, Heavenly Mother and many more. Rather than seeing such topics as subjects which must be skirted around to produce faithful, uplifting writing, many Mormon women have shown how grappling with these issues through honest spiritual inquiry and literary forms can become critical components in constructing an honest spiritual life.

So what does our loyal reader mean when she says that she "hopes [we'll] get more radical?" In the last two years alone, *Exponent II* has devoted entire issues to women's relationship to the priesthood and reflected honestly and critically on women's experience with temple worship. In 2014 we published an article praising the beauty of attending a gay wedding in Utah, and an article criticizing the Church for not putting as much political weight behind immigration reform as it did behind Prop 8. The truth is that for most modern LDS readers, the topics we explore radically exceed correlated boundaries.

"In recent years as we've seen the formation of many Mormon feminist groups whose explicit activist agendas are intent on changing minds, policies, and perhaps even doctrine, is *Exponent II*'s mission to share a variety of Mormon women's voices still seen as radical?"

So if the boldness of our subject matter isn't really in question, it seems that what our good reader is really asking is whether or not the act of validating a variety of lived experiences as authentically Mormon qualifies as "radical" in and of itself. In recent years as we've seen the formation of many activist Mormon feminist groups including WAVE (Women Advocating for Voice and Equality), Let Women Pray, Pants, and Ordain Women, whose explicit activist agendas are intent on changing minds, policies, and perhaps even doctrine, is *Exponent II*'s mission to share a variety of Mormon women's voices still seen as radical? This question was driven home to me a few months ago when a friend of mine who's heavily involved in one of these activist organizations commented that we Exponent women "just don't seem to have an activist bone in our bodies." I was taken aback. Every time we pay to put these words in print, a glorious hope rises up in me that feels simultaneously brave, holy, and defiant. But as our reader has proven, my friend doesn't seem to be alone in this assessment of what constitutes radicalism in this current moment. And it causes me to wonder, as a feminist organization, is *Exponent II* obligated to do more than share and support the variety of women's choices seen in the pages of our magazine? Or do we need to explicitly define and model a fully-conceived Mormon feminist rhetoric and agenda of our own?

As Ordain Women was gaining steam and national media attention in 2014, *Exponent II* was contacted by media outlets who were interested in how our organization positioned itself in the conversation about women and the priesthood. I think that on all sides, many were disappointed in the stock response I offered which was that *Exponent II* is not an "activist" organization lobbying for specific institutional changes. As we have since the ERA debates of the 1970s and 80s, *Exponent II* shares the thoughts and experiences of Mormon women considering their role within a patriarchal structure, without advocating a position of our own. *Exponent II*'s objective to provide a forum where Mormon women across the spectrum feel safe to explore these ideas, is in itself a feminist statement, I argued.

What I fear this argument inadvertently conveys to some is a wishy-washy feminism loosely defined as simply supporting all women's choices. And yet I believe that the work of *Exponent II* is so much more than that. If part of the work of feminism is to reveal a world which is fundamentally more limited for women than for men, *Exponent II* has done that both implicitly and explicitly throughout its history. But in the current Mormon feminist activist climate which aims not just to reveal but also to actively upend patriarchal structures, *should Exponent II* do more than validate the diverse experiences of Mormon women and instead insist that the experiences from which they choose be

more expansive to begin with? In *Exponent II*'s mission statement the word "feminist" isn't even used, for example. Should it be? Laurel's remarks from earlier tonight are the first time I've ever heard that *Exponent II* was originally "poised on the dual platforms of Mormonism and Feminism," whose two aims, Claudia Bushman declared, were "to strengthen the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to encourage and develop the talents of Mormon women." I'm not sure why this was removed from our mission statement, but I for one would like to see it brought back.

The implicit feminist project of *Exponent II*'s uncorrelated publication of living history was more than enough for many to consider us too radical or subversive throughout the first three decades of our existence. But then Feminist Mormon Housewives came on the scene in 2004, putting the "F" word at the center of the conversation. fMh and the Bloggernacle at large spawned even more online Mormon feminist forums and no doubt even influenced the formation and early content of *The Exponent* blog. I believe the authoratitive and ubiquituous use of the "F" word has galvanized many of the activist oriented organizations and rhetoric we have seen crop up in the last few years. It has in some ways also opened a chasm between women who feel a need for changes they themselves have not yet named, and those who know exactly what they want and are making efforts to effect those changes themselves.

There's no question in my mind that these activist groups have made an impact on the institution and culture of the Church in the last few years that many of us would applaud. Indeed, much of what has been percolating in the Mormon feminist echo chamber seems finally to have found its way into more mainstream or self-described "moderate Mormon" circles. While there's a healthy debate to be had about whether or not groups like "let women pray" or Ordain Women actually jeopardize the institutional changes they seek by putting the Church in a position where making any changes might appear as though the institution was succumbing to outside pressure, there's *no* question that these conversations are reaching lay members as well as those at the top of Church leadership.

So where does *Exponent II* fit into this landscape going forward? What do we need to do as an organization to stay relevant in broad Mormon feminist conversations while also staying true to our original mission? Does a project like our upcoming coloring book which will depict a diverse group of women from Mormon history have the capacity to grab the attention of both those in and outside mainstream Mormonism? Or are these subtler forms of feminist education seen as too dangerous by those already afraid of the "F" word, while being dismissed as merely paying tribute to a radical past without challenging the future by members of more activist feminist groups?

In my bones I believe in *Exponent II*'s mission to act as a living history of the current moment. In a world inundated with individual perspectives cropping up in dozens of public online forums daily, I believe more than ever in the importance of rigorously curating and publishing as broad a spectrum of Mormon women's voices as possible to represent our historical moment. Such even-handedness may not appear radical, but as our resident historians here will likely affirm, the quiet voices that are often lost to history may be where the biggest cultural shifts are manifested in the end.

And so this work requires that we capture not just the finely honed Mormon women's voices (whether they be radically feminist or radically anti-feminist), but the voice of the woman who is still seeking, still listening, and just beginning to wonder for the first time why she can't help bless and name the infant she brought into the world; why she can't hear a voice like hers trip-up the words to the sacrament prayer; why the grand promises of eternity given in the temple are not so much hers as they are unto her husband; why she feels uneasy everytime the word "feminist" is used; and how she, like all of us, begins to make sense of the internal dissonance these thoughts often produce.

In our church we are taught to stand as living witnesses to God's work. I believe that as *Exponent II* continues to procure and publish this living history that more fully reveals modern Mormon womanhood, we not only honor the emboldening legacy we've inherited, but that as we move forward collectively, creatively and wisely, 40 years from now our literal and figurative daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters might be able to sing "Woman Rise" in the past tense. For myself, I cannot imagine a more radical change I'd like to see.

Breaking THE MOLD

I am *black. I* am *Mormon. I* am *a feminist. I could never deny any of these facets of myself. They influence the decisions I make, they explain my actions, and shape my outlook to the world.*

By Chelsea Sue • Brooklyn, New York

Separately, the words "black", "Mormon", and "feminist" are just your average assorted words. "I'm black." "He's Mormon." "She's a feminist." Nothing strange about those sentences, right? String those words together, however, and there is a different story. The story of being black, Mormon, *and* a feminist. Three strikes and I'm out. Add in the fact that I'm 22, and I'm probably the most neglected demographic out there. Still, I *am* black. I *am* Mormon. I *am* a feminist. I could never deny any of these facets of myself. They influence the decisions I make, they explain my actions, and shape my outlook to the world.

I grew up in a fairly progressive household. I grew up knowing that women were just as good as men, but never knew the word for that knowledge. Feminism wasn't in my vocabulary growing up. It was just part of life. I never felt the need to speak up or be vocal about my egalitarian beliefs. I knew that women could raise children on their own and have careers. I knew that there was no limit to what men or women could do and that I had options in life. There was nothing around me that challenged those beliefs.

At the same time, I grew up in a very non-religious household. Growing up, God was background music––you knew He was there but didn't pay much attention. Still, that belief in God was instilled to me and when I first started involving myself with the LDS Church, the message that was presented to me about God and Christ resonated. I aligned myself wholeheartedly with my newfound faith. Because I was such an eager new member when I was baptized in 2010 (after three years of investigating), I was happy to accept any and all new teachings thrown at me, even if it went against the teachings I originally grew up with.

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World" became dear to me and Julie Beck's talk "Mothers Who Know" made sense. Those in my ward knew what they were doing and seemed happy. I quickly came to believe that all Mormons were this way. Teachings that I now I find problematic, felt acceptable when I first joined because everyone around me seemed okay. I accepted the traditional beliefs put forth by the Church and was thereby labeled as conservative by my peers.

As a senior in high school with my newfound faith and desire to surround myself with like-minded Saints, attending Brigham Young University (BYU) seemed the logical next step. I set out to Utah to be among my people, where my new beliefs would be nurtured and accepted.

"As an African-American convert, it was hard finding my place at Brigham Young University."

"Jordon" By Denise Gasser • Vancouver, British Columbia

Though I now look back at my time at BYU with fondness, my first year was rough. As an African-American convert, it was hard finding my place at BYU. I always stood out. Professors always remembered my name first—how could they forget the name of the only black girl in class? And then all of the stereotypes thrown at me were rough as well. My peers would say things like, *"You must love rap music, right?" "Shouldn't basketball be your favorite sport? You're black!" "A lot of people probably think you're here on an athletic scholarship." "You probably only got in because you're black."* To make matters worse, I discovered the majority of women I met talked nearly exclusively about being homemakers, having several children, and looking for a worthy priesthood holder to marry while studying at school. That definitely wasn't my M.O. I came to school for, well, an education! It amazed me that my female friends admitted that their primary goal for attending

college was not just to receive an education but to find a spouse! Seeing these ideals being touted by those around me, I asked myself, *"Was this what I'm actually supposed to believe? Was this what I changed myself into back home when I joined? Are these the people I now affiliate myself with?"* Things that weren't problematic to me as a Mormon back East suddenly became problematic out West now that I saw them right in front of me. Things in church were taught as black and white at BYU, whereas the church I knew back home—while still adhering to core Mormon beliefs—accepted various shades of gray. Defending the beliefs I grew up with to people who held many of the beliefs I cling to now, helped me find a name that encompassed my beliefs—feminism. And I knew that I had a responsibility to defend and fight for my feminist ideals.

My peers at BYU were not entirely to blame, however. Every BYU student is repeatedly told that marriage is a worthy priority. I still remember a freshman orientation devotional that then-President Samuelson gave to all of us excitable and eager freshmen. Essentially President Samuelson told us if we had not found a spouse by the end of our four years at BYU, we had wasted our time. Whether or not it was a tongue-in-cheek comment meant to be funny is up for debate. Serious or not, it rubbed me the wrong way. Shouldn't we have all been told to take as many classes as available? To open up our minds to different ways of thinking? To make good friends and interact with world-class professors? No. We were told that marriage should be our top priority. As a New Yorker raised by a single mom, this priority did not resonate with me. I was brought up to believe—and live—the idea that women shouldn't rely on any man for financial or emotional well-being. Seeing the destructive relationship between my parents and how my mother raised me with only some financial and emotional support from my father, helped me to learn that early on. And all throughout my schooling and my associations with others back home, I learned that having a career was a priority, along with having a family (if one so desired). Whether or not you wanted to be married and become a homemaker is entirely up to the individual. When I first associated with the Church, I thought being a stay-at-home mom was a good idea and an option but repeatedly hearing marriage being presented as the only possible choice for women at BYU was disturbing. Along with fierce criticism of those who fall outside of the Mormon norm, it was the beginning of the end.

Over the course of my freshman year at BYU, I looked online for communities that would help with my feminist transition and would follow me all the way to graduation day. Now that I had a name for my beliefs and saw a real need to defend and cultivate them, I found blogs like Feminist Mormon Housewives, By Common Consent, and Times & Seasons. I never commented (I am shy, which makes me prone to being a "lurker"), but I read everything with great fervency. *Finally! Places that understand the cognitive dissonance I'm going through*, I thought. And through these blogging communities, I found my beloved Exponent II community. Again, I never commented. Many of the pieces written by the wonderful Exponent bloggers really resonated with me. From chastity to feelings toward the temple, the posts spoke truth to me. You weren't hellbound if you struggled with the law of chastity, it was okay if you had doubts, and dressing modestly wasn't an indicator of your standing with God. It was refreshing to see Mormon women discussing matters of the soul, matters that aren't discussed openly. These people—these women—were friends, if only virtually.

"Being involved with Exponent has helped me take steps towards self-care and self-respect. I can now approach Mormonism in my own way. I am no longer that eager-to-please new convert who was willing to change everything about myself and my beliefs to please the institutional Church."

When an Exponent blogger moved into my home ward in Brooklyn and invited me to have lunch with another writer on the blog, I jumped at this opportunity to break bread with my kindred feminist sisters. It was amazing to talk openly about our joys, struggles, and triumphs within the Church. It helped me not feel alone. I wasn't the only one who struggled with the conflicting identities of being Mormon and feminist. And how great was my joy when I was invited to become a permablogger. Being involved with Exponent has helped me take steps towards self-care and self-respect. I can now approach Mormonism in my own way. I am no longer that eager-to-please new convert who was willing to change everything about myself and my beliefs to please the institutional Church. I can now live my faith on my own terms. Reading *The Exponent* blog has exposed me to different attitudes about many topics, including different ways women wear (or don't wear) their garments and various interpretations on the law of chastity. Because of my association with Exponent, Mormon feminism is now more real, tangible, personable, and powerful.

Now I can't imagine not being a part of the Exponent community and Mormon feminism at large. Had I not found Exponent, I probably would have given up on the LDS faith. I would have continued to think that the LDS faith and community is one-size-fits-all. And then I would be another young woman disassociated from the Church. Another young woman lost from the fold and away from the gospel who would not add to the diversity of the Church. As feminist woman of faith, I can say now that I know there is a place for me in the LDS Church. I know that the Savior needs me here.

As a feminist woman of faith *of color* there is still work to be done. The LDS Church has few black members, so being a black Mormon feminist is to be a minority within a minority within a minority. Stereotypes, as previously mentioned, still abound. Regardless, black voices matter. I don't think that the Mormon feminist community has fully recognized this yet. I feel more comfortable within the younger online community of Mormon feminists than within the community of Exponent in terms of discussing race matters. In the former community, most members are my peers and are racially diverse or have been exposed to diversity so they respect the voices of others. For whatever reason, the Exponent community hasn't spoken enough about race. I hope to begin to change that, but for now, when it comes to general feminist matters I turn to Exponent. When it comes to feminist matters for people of color, I must turn to another community.

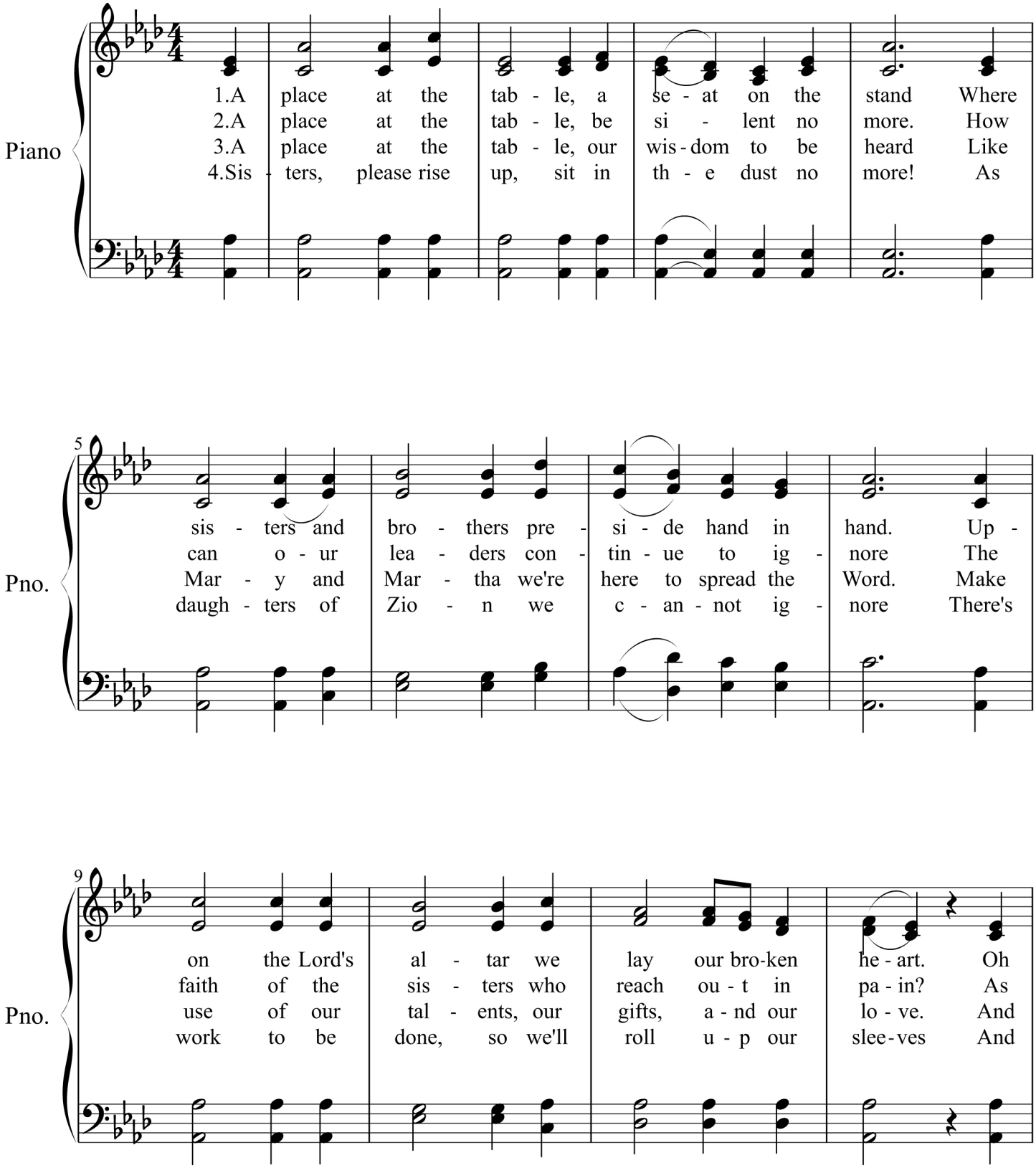
"When it comes to general feminist matters I turn to Exponent. When it comes to feminist matters for people of color, I must turn to another community."

We can do better. I know that this community, which has done so very much for me in the past, can do much more for myself and others going forward. We need more voices from people of color, from the LGBTQ community, and from those who suffer from addiction. We need all of their voices. We must be open to them. "Do not talk about them, without them" should be one of our mottos. We must invite differing perspectives. Women's struggles must be shared so we can mourn with those who mourn.

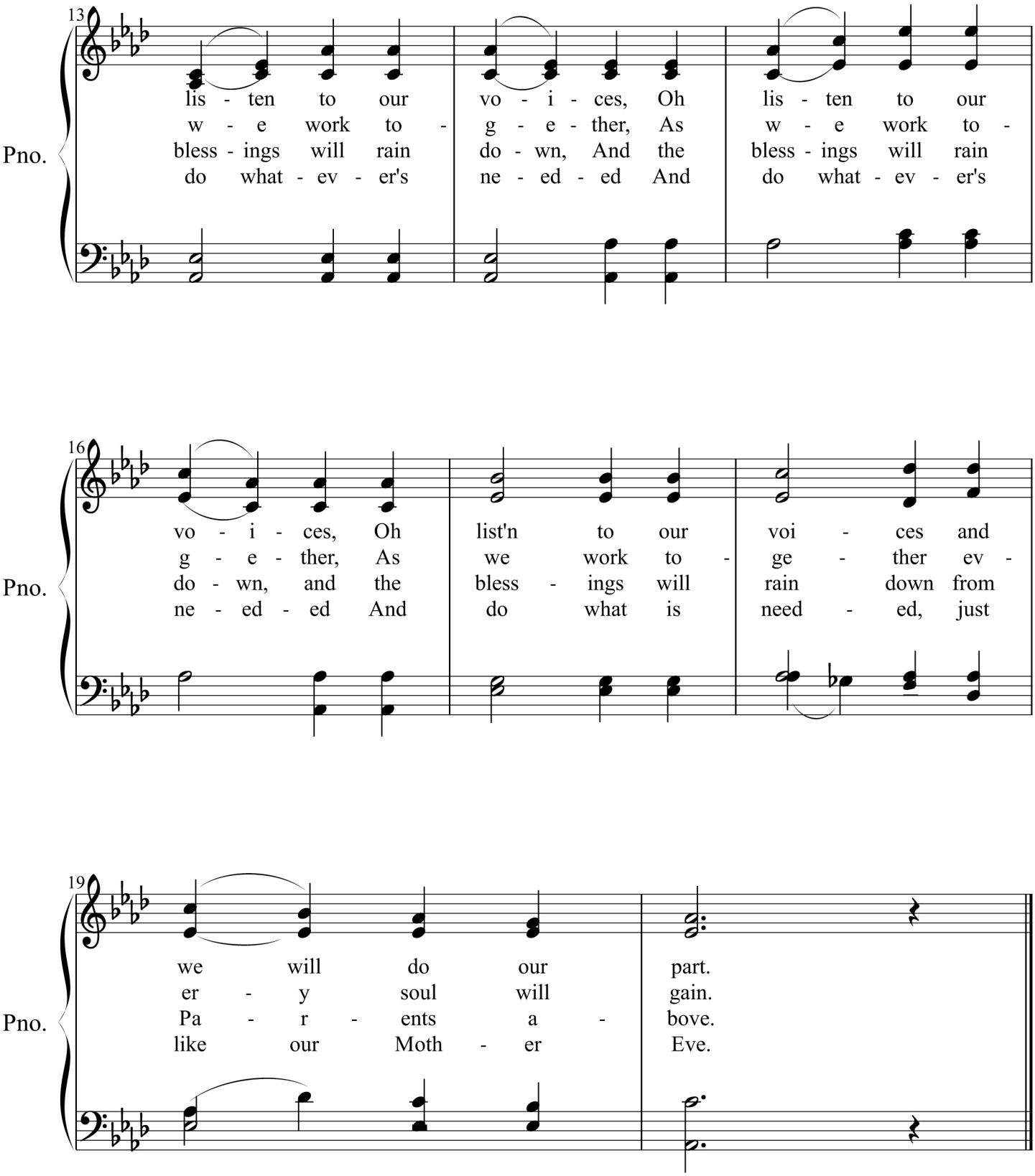
The Exponent has been such a beacon of change and hope to blossoming Mormon feminists like myself and countless others. I would be so pleased to be part of this community moving forward. And ever onward we go.

A Place at the Table

Lyrics by Heather Sundahl | Sung to the tune of "How Firm a Foundation"



"A place at the table, be silent no more. How can our leaders continue to ignore the faith of the sisters who reach out in pain?"



EXPONENT II REVISITED PICK:
SELECTED BY SUSAN HOWE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF 1981-1984

During the early years of *Exponent II*, the board and staff held an annual celebration called the Exponent Day Dinner, at which an outstanding Mormon woman was invited to give an address. In 1982, Lavina Fielding Anderson graciously accepted the invitation to attend and give that address, which was subsequently published in the Summer 1982 issue. I chose "On Being Happy: An Exercise in Spiritual Autobiography" as the essay from my tenure as editor to reprint in *Exponent II*'s 40th Anniversary issue for several reasons. I was touched emotionally and spiritually by the stories Lavina shared. I appreciated her intellectual engagement and spiritual exercise in developing her testimony, making important decisions, and facing trials in her life. I learned so much from this essay about spiritual maturity, inspiration, and personal responsibility, lessons that are timeless and will benefit anyone who considers them–both women and men.

This essay has also served as a model of the spiritual autobiography, an individual's written record of his or her personal spiritual journey. Many, many sisters and brothers have been led by this essay to record and share their own spiritual autobiographies, a practice that I hope will continue long into the future because it offers such a depth of insight into how the Lord is present in each life and because that shared understanding helps to create a truly bonded community of saints.

ON BEING HAPPY:
AN EXERCISE IN SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

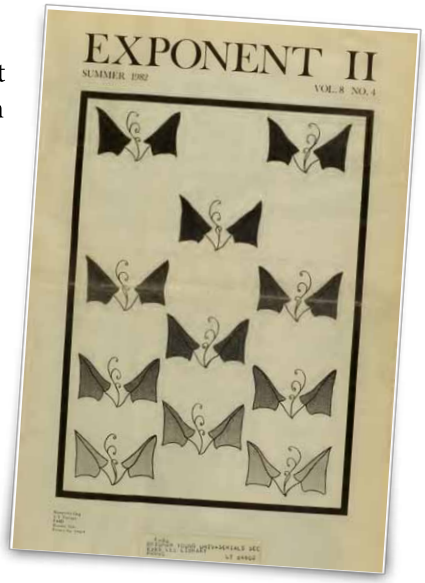
By Lavina Fielding Anderson • Vol. 8 No. 4 Summer 1982

(This essay has been edited for length.)

I think there are periods in most members' lives where they find the Church sustaining and nourishing. I think there are also times in most members' lives where Church involvement is at least as demanding and draining as it is rewarding. These cycles are natural; to weight the down side with guilt makes it harder, in my opinion, to accept the upswings joyously and naturally. I feel that my spiritual life is my own responsibility—that the Church, the scriptures, and the Holy Ghost offer a smörgåsbord of opportunities from which I select what my spiritual diet requires right now. I find myself attracted to the ideas of personal spiritual power because now, particularly in contrast with certain other periods of Church history, the contributions of women seem circumscribed to carefully defined areas, and the very thoroughness of the organization of the Church means that there are few areas not covered by some rule, policy, or the need for someone's permission to act.

Yet I feel that the Church cannot indefinitely continue to afford the sheer waste of restricting women and their talents to the spheres in which they are most commonly exercised at present.

I do not want to imply that I think the work of women in the Church is trivial or unnecessary. Quite the contrary, I do, however, want to suggest that there are some limitations built into the current roles for women in the Church that may be limiting in ways that the gospel itself is not.



And now we come to the sermon. Let me introduce it with a poem by Maryann Olsen MacMurray entitled "Calling."

> When asked what I do in the Kingdom, I
> Reply that I am in the Extraction
> Program with my husband and a few friends:
>
> Extracting principles from procedures
> And realities from types, determining
> Whether we're walking on water or thin ice.
>
> (Used by permission of the author)

If Elder Neal A. Maxwell is accurate when he says that our trials are tailored to our capabilities—and I believe he is—then I believe it is also true that our blessings are bestowed with the same distinctiveness. My experiences have, I believe, given me the right to testify to the existence of a Heavenly Father whose love is matched only by His respect for our agency. I believe that I have not only the right but the responsibility to testify. As I have felt this divine love directed toward me, I have felt the desire to respond in a manner worthy of the gift, a desire also given direction by President Kimball's prophetic injunction in April 1979 that 'the major strides which must be made by the Church will follow upon the major strides to be made by us as individuals."[1]

"My experiences have, I believe, given me the right to testify to the existence of a Heavenly Father whose love is matched only by His respect for our agency."

I feel a particular need to focus on personal righteousness, on thoroughly developing and refining spiritual skills. I have already mentioned one of the most important—prayer. Fasting is another. Temple attendance is a third, I won't go into detail about either, but I'd suggest thinking about both of them as processes as well as activities, as processes whose end result is spiritual power, as processes that engage us intellectually, physically, culturally, and emotionally. Thinking about them multidimensionally has let me discover new dimensions of power in them. Another skill I'd recommend for our contemplation is that of bearing testimony—meaning that we find ways of acknowledging the reality of Christ's power in our daily lives, in daily Ianguage, beyond jargon and beyond formulae.

There are two spiritual skills that I'd like to discuss in greater detail. The first is reading the scriptures. It is both an activity and a process. Like most of us, I find my scripture study most meaningful when I go to the scriptures with a question, a sorrow, a joy, a need of some sort. But also, if my scripture study isn't habitual, I find that it doesn't help me a lot when I am in need. So I have found that regular reading is essential even if there are times when, like prayer, it only seems like going through the motions. Those motions are important training for spiritual muscles.

I'm currently reading the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which has never been my favorite book. I've spent most of my life feeling bored by the lack of narrative and unnerved by its nineteenth-century strangeness. But right now it is my favorite book. I am struck by two things. The first is the sheer quantity of the words of Jesus Christ. We have more instruction, counsel, sermons, and explanations from Him in this book than we do in the rest of our scriptures put together. The second thing is the revelation of His relationship over time with a small group of individuals, particularly with Joseph Smith. I find in that relationship a great respect for Joseph Smith's agency, clear expectations for his conduct, chastisement when those expectations are not met, an enormous willingness to answer questions—including some that Joseph hadn't quite asked—and a genuine delight in the attempts of those early Saints to be obedient, to understand, to emulate Him. It has given me great confidence that my own efforts will be acceptable and pleasing.

It was in this context that I found great reinforcement for yet another spiritual skill—seeking spiritual gifts. These gifts, according to Section 46, include a testimony of Jesus Christ as the son of God and the redeemer of the world, faith to believe those who have that testimony, "differences of administration, as it will be pleasing unto the same Lord . . . according to the conditions of the children of men" (which I interpret to mean a sensitivity to the kind of service that is

appropriate in different circumstances), knowing the "diversities of operations, whether they be of God," a word of wisdom, knowledge, faith to heal, faith to be healed, "the working of miracles," the gift of prophecy, the "discerning of spirits,' and tongues and their interpretation (D&C 46:12-25). I would like to add to this list the gift of charity which, as Moroni tells us, the Father bestows upon those who are "true followers of . . . Jesus Christ" who "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart for that gift" (Moroni 7:48).

I recall listening to many lessons on spiritual gifts, most of them centered around what they are and the fact that they are to benefit the Church. I remember one daring teacher who asked us to identify what spiritual gift(s) we possessed, a request that baffled and seemed to embarrass the class. Many lessons warned against the improper use of gifts, against sign-seekers and those who were deceived in thinking their gifts came from God. Some time was also spent redefining the gifts so that "tongues" meant the ability for missionaries to learn a foreign language easily, and "prophecy" meant a gift that was given to ecclesiastical leaders for their own stewardships. But I never recall hearing anyone mention that we are commanded to ask for gifts, that God promises to give them "liberally" provided that the seeker does "all things with prayer and thanksgiving" to avoid being deceived, remembers that the purpose of spiritual gifts is to benefit those who love the Savior, "and keep all [His] commandments" or "seek . . . so to do" (D&C 46:7-9, 26).

In the by-no-means extensive research that I have done into nineteenth-century saints, I have been struck repeatedly by their hunger for spiritual gifts and manifestations and by their willingness to pray directly for them. Sarah Studevsnt Leavitt noted crisply in her autobiography, "I lived very watchful and prayerful, never neglecting my prayers, for I felt that I was entitled to no blessing unless I asked for them, and I think so yet."[2] Her blessings included symbolic visions. Sanford Porter, after three days of anguished fasting and prayer, heard a voice and saw a personage dressed in brilliant white who unfolded a vision of the creation, the Atonement, and his own place in the plan to him.[3] Benjamin Brown, an ancestor of Hugh B. Brown and Nathan Eldon Tanner, specifically asked "for the witness of the Nephite disciples" and was visited by "two Nephites" speaking to him in the same tongue he had heard at a Mormon meeting.[4] When Elizabeth Francis Yates decided to be baptized in England, her mother "forbade her to reenter her childhood home." Her husband first abandoned her and her four daughters, then when this economic bludgeoning did not work, returned and took the four girls away from her. She had to be baptized at midnight in 1851 because Mormons were fair game for harassment. On the brink of the dark river she hesitated and "felt as though I could not possibly go in it. But a voice seemed to say, 'There is no other way.'" She remarried, came to Utah, was reunited with her two living daughters through extraordinary circumstances, and had a second family. One daughter, Louise Yates Robison, became General President of the Relief Society.[5]

It has long been commonplace to admire that first generation for their endurance in suffering but assure ourselves, "We have our own trials." I would like to suggest that instead of making facile contrasts based on widely differing circumstances that we get serious about the gospel in the same way they did. They were not seeking inappropriate signs when they prayed for the gift of prophecy, for the ministry of angels, for visions, for healing, and for revelation. We would not be either if we, like them, did so "in all holiness of heart."

We have not asked for the spiritual gifts, and thus we have denied them. We are all, I think, aware of the dangers of the improper seeking of and exercise of the spiritual gifts, the dangers of being deceived, the dangers of wanting to be "conspicuously" holy instead of genuinely consecrated, the risks of emotional exploitation and spiritual pornography, and of playing the "I am a spiritual giant" game. There's also the very real question that could be asked, "But why do we need them? What would we do with them?"

I think that asking that question is a confession. How could we explain the need for literacy to a person who has never seen a book and feels no need for records that extend behind his or her memory? Most of us have, however, either experienced the gift of healing in our lives or know of those who have. Let us ask those individuals if the gift is one they would dispense with.

Furthermore, as I study the scriptures, I am struck by the way in which the roles our society finds desirable shape and define what we identify as our spiritual natures. Women in the Church today are assigned to be teachers, auxiliary executives, visiting teachers,

neighbors, and even wives and mothers—but what of previous generations and dispensations when a woman could also be a prophetess and a priestess? Is it possible that these roles could still exist for women prepared to fill them?

I feel very strongly that the relationship between spiritual authority and institutional authority has become lopsided in recent generations—that we are given callings and then we seek for the spiritual skills and gifts we need to fulfill those callings, experiencing genuine growth but frequently losing the new talents when we are released from the calling. I believe, however, that if women were spiritually equipped to serve, opportunities would be created to match capabilities and that we could offer the Lord our strengths as well as our inadequacies. People I know who have sought and received the gift of charity do not need an assignment to exercise it, for it overflows any calling they receive. But these people are also likely to receive callings.

One of the women who has become a spiritual mentor for me has been Elmina S. Taylor, a convert who, during the first four years of her marriage, never lost faith in the promise made to her through the gift of tongues that she would have a family. She bore seven children and was later called to become the first General President of the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association. When she died, Joseph F. Smith preached the main sermon. He had been associated with Elmina since 1880 when he had become first assistant to the general YMMIA superintendent. He was now not only its general superintendent but President of the Church as well. Announcing rather tartly that "it is not my custom to speak praise of our departed loved ones," he made an exception to his own rule and characterized Elmina as "one of the few in the world who walked by the light within her" instead of by "borrowed light." "Therefore," he said, "she had power among her associates and her sisters. She was legitimately the head of the organization over which she was called to preside. She borrowed no influence from others. She bore her own influence upon the minds of those with whom she was associated."[6]

A great deal has been said in recent years about women and power. I suggest that we follow Elmina's example and seek the power of personal righteousness, power from on high, power in testimony, and power in the Lord Jesus Christ. I was impressed by the Lord's commandment to Oliver Cowdery when he was experimenting with translation to "trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not." This warning could be a frightening one, but the next sentence urges, "Ask that you may know the mysteries of God" (D&C 8:10-11).

The Lord promised Joseph and Oliver that they should "both have according to your desires, for ye have both joy in that which ye have desired" (D&C 7:8). It is significant to me that their joy confirmed the righteousness of their desire, that their joy was the reason the Lord granted them their desire. It reinforces my idea that the seeking of happiness is a spiritually healthy thing to do and corroborates my experience that happiness characterizes righteousness.

I feel that we may have circumscribed our limits too narrowly. Our birthright is joy not weariness, courage not caution, and faith not fear. By covenant and consecration, may we claim it.

NOTES:

[1] "Let us Move Forward and Upward," *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 82.

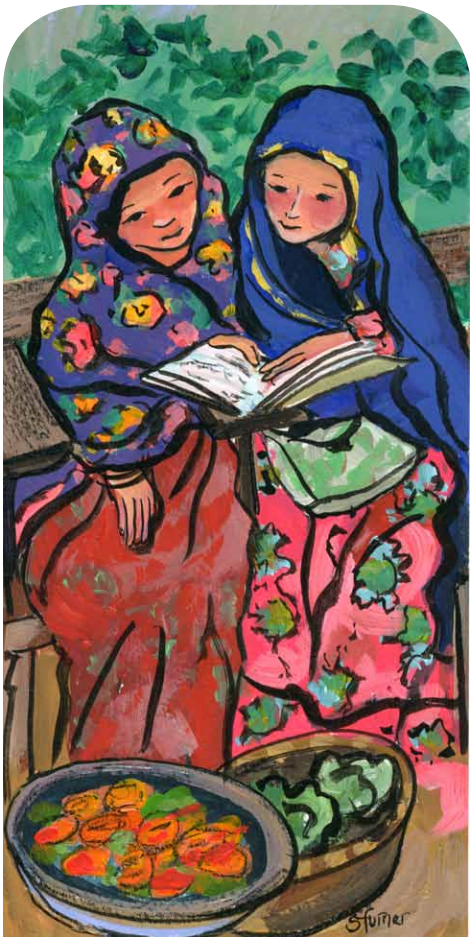
[2] Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, Jill Mulvey Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*, Salt Lake City Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1982, p. 29.

[3] Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Challenge to Greatness: The Nineteenth-Century Saints in New York," *Ensign*. September 1978, p. 28.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 29

[5] Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Elizabeth Francis Yates: Trial by Heartbreak," *Ensign*, July 1979, p. 62.

[6] Funeral Services of Elmina S. Taylor," *Improvement Era*, January 8, 1905, p. 221.



"Girls Read Together", "Peace", and "Reading Girl", by Sharon Furner • Matthews, North Carolina

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL MORMONISM: DECOLONIZATION AND INCLUSIVITY

If the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to become globally relevant, there needs to be a significant shift in the way it approaches the business of Otherness.

Gina Colvin • Christchurch, New Zeland

Our family lived in Taiwan for four years during the early 2000s. During that time, I noticed an awkward deference toward certain foreign members of the ward, particularly the New Zealanders and the Americans. Sadly this did not extend toward the Filipinos. While we First World foreigners enjoyed the esteem of our local hosts, the Filipino expatriates experienced no such regard. In retrospect they were essentially rendered invisible, by us and the local Taiwanese. While we basked in the privilege of our wholly undeserved social status, I noticed, with less concern than I should have, the loneliness of the Filipino Saints who deserved more attention than I cared to give them. In this church space, class and racial distinctions remained fixed and unchallenged as if the identity ascribed to my brothers and sisters by the world was immutable at church.

This seeming inability to address the real-time classism and ethnocentrism that abounds is problematic as the LDS Church grows internationally and inserts itself into international communities, and as it provides new religious repertoires and discourses among its globally

diverse adherents. This is particularly problematic as the Church continues to expand and grow in the Global South.

In the past, Mormonism combated classism through a significant investment in LDS education. Sociologists refer to Mormonism as a high-tension, high-demand religion, meaning that it creates culturally radical departures from local communities that can cause a severing of familial ties upon conversion.[1] But these familial disruptions have historically been replaced by highly orchestrated systems of socialization, assimilation, and education that have led to notable degrees of social mobility, particularly where the Church has made an investment in education for the children of converts.[2] The LDS Church ran the education system in the Utah and the Mormon colonies up until the late nineteenth century. It then ventured out internationally into the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, and Mexico in order to ensure the socialization and upward mobility of its children.[3] But those were costly projects. Over the last decade the Church has closed secondary schools in New Zealand and Mexico. For the poor elsewhere the Church has instead launched the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) as a mechanism whereby Mormons from developing countries can access education loans to attend university.[4] There is, of course, a financial imperative here. If the Church can ensure the social mobility of its converts through education, then it can make a long term return on its PEF investment through increased tithing revenue.

It has long been part of the Mormon project to sustainably constitute an upwardly mobile demographic. However, upward social mobility is becoming increasingly difficult as the gap between the rich and the poor widens. While there are success stories, the number of Mormon children living in poverty throughout the world is significant enough to warrant the concern of an international NGO, the Liahona Children's Foundation, whose goal it is to eliminate malnutrition among LDS children. Their projects currently involve providing food for and health monitoring to impoverished Mormon children in Guatemala, Ecuador, Cambodia, and Peru. This they do without the LDS Church's assistance. Thus while the social mobility of poor LDS individuals through education loans is of interest to the Church, relief for LDS children currently experiencing hunger seems not as urgent.

The failure to provide material support for poor LDS individuals beyond education loans indicates a larger potential problem for Mormonism's Zion project. Namely, as the Church grows internationally and as its numbers increase throughout the Global South, without a sound and socially conscious philosophy and theological praxis, that Zion project, wherein there are no poor among us, will falter. It will simply reproduce a marginalizing global class system, the same that I was unable to name and disrupt in my ward in Fengyuan.

I was mindful of this classism at another time during my residence in Taiwan. The missionaries had brought a Bunun woman to church. Bunun are an indigenous tribe who, through colonization by the Han Chinese, have been culturally, religiously and politically reduced in their circumstances. Her presence created a palpable ripple in the congregation. I don't necessarily believe that there was a racial discourse circulating as much as there was marginalizing cultural and class discourse, one that suggested to me that she was tolerated but not necessarily welcome because she didn't represent the dominant Asian-Western middle class culture.

I have noticed over the years a tendency for missionaries to bring the needy to church which has coincided with our congregations' incapacity to make a significant difference in the lives of the very poor. We have few resources returned to us from our tithing donations. As New Zealanders, we live in a nation that has high living costs. As a result, for many Mormons it is very difficult to pay tithing, to manage busy domestic and work lives, *and* to look after the poor and the needy. Gordon Hinckley's instructive: "*We need as individuals…to reach down and extend a helping hand without notice…to give of that which the Lord has so generously blessed us,*" assumes incorrectly that every Mormon has enough time and means left over to do this work of their own accord.[5] As a result the poor and needy generally pass through our congregations. Once turned over by the missionaries to the wards, they flounder and often leave.

Unless we radically reframe Mormon discourses that have traditionally sought to constitute the ideal Mormon middle class Global South subject by socializing them through education, we run the risk of colonizing and overrunning local communities with an ideology of American cultural and class imperialism. As the American Empire moves to more corporatized neo-liberal forms of institutional control, replications of these national assimilationist models are at odds with the overarching message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ's message of love and caring for the poor eschews the profit-oriented, corporatized theology that has come to dominate many LDS Church operations.

We need to reframe the way in which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints manages its global mission in order to become institutionally mindful of the particularities of its own culturally constructed religious and spiritual practices. At its American Western core, the Church has been historically remiss in its efforts to truly respect and support the diverse cultural, political, economic, and social contexts of its worldwide adherents, notwithstanding its huge international outreach through the missionary programme.

Furthermore, Mormonism doesn't tend to bend and flex in a way that makes for a naturally inclusive community. The Church government as a socially constructed entity predictably carries unexamined assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge about how Mormonism and Mormons ought to look, sound, and behave. These aspirations roll over into its borderland communities where the state/church/cultural nexus is made more complex by communities who are not a natural cultural fit with Salt Lake City Mormonism.

I would therefore like to propose a model for bringing diverse communities together and gather them comfortably onto the same metaphorical pew without culturally alienating or requiring them to severe their cultural limbs in the process. That model is inclusion.

An inclusive orientation would cause the Church government to allow their international communities to think about who they are as Mormons in that place and how they can contribute to their local communities. These diverse Mormon communities would be empowered to draw on their own dialogues, rather than being dependent on Salt Lake City to make sense of who they are and the limits and boundaries of their community engagements.

An inclusive Mormonism would not make assumptions that Western education is founded upon a system of truth that is superior. It would encourage local systems of knowledge and culture to be present in LDS spaces rather than requiring a complete divestment of local languages and knowledges. Thus, an inclusive religion would involve American-born Mormons listening to unfamiliar voices, and being open to new ways of thinking, making sense of the world, and remaining open to critique from those at the margins of the Church.

In an inclusive LDS community, the Church periphery is not simply something to be petted or tolerated by the Church core but would recognize the problems inherent in a framework of 'Us and Other,' America and 'the rest,' 'the middle-classes' and the 'underclasses.' These taken-for-granted discourses give rise to separation and the stereotyping of differences that create divisions and diminish the dignity of individuals.

An inclusive religion emphasizes participation and provides contexts in which every one in that community, including women and children, are vested in the labour required to meet the challenges of supporting the needs of each member. An inclusive church experience will involve community discussions about how Mormons will reach out authentically to solve the spiritual and temporal heartaches that Mormons and their broader communities suffer from, such as food and water scarcity, political problems, inequality, sexism, environmental degradation, the exploitation of children, and the abuse of girls and women.

An inclusive religious community thinks about what will bring their community joy, and cause them to smile, sing, laugh, celebrate, and feast together at the same table.

"Global South women leaders need to be honored, listened to, given resources, supported, and respected by the Global North Church."

Most importantly an inclusive religious community on the Church's periphery would engage with the real-time issues that its adherents face around the world, and allow real-time solutions to surface. Leadership structures are not entities that ought to be imposed on diverse communities in order to create institutional coherence. Rather, leadership needs to be discovered and enabled wherever it lies—particularly the leadership of women—and the institution needs to be able to respond to this with empathy, humility, and support, particularly in places where women are not safe with men.

I propose this in the context of Global South communities, particularly where women and girls suffer tremendously as a result of domestic violence, sexual abuse, hunger, poverty, abandonment, genital mutilation, the need for female contraception, social shunning, child sex trafficking, maternal mortality, illiteracy, and war. You cannot impose a white Mormon patriarchy in these contexts and imagine that these complex social issues for girls and women are going to be solved simply through a Branch President-conducted ward council, or Sunday Relief Society instruction about the teachings of a deceased male North American President of the Church.

Furthermore, allowing white American middle-class women to manage and control the LDS response to Global South issues is merely a feminized version of white colonialism. Women's issues need to be addressed by the women from those places. The conversations, the stories and narratives of our worldwide sisters, and the language to empower local female leaders to problem-solve at the point of trouble is utterly essential. These Global South women leaders need to be honored, listened to, given resources, supported, and respected by the Global North Church.

If the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to become globally relevant, there needs to be a significant shift in the way it approaches the business of Otherness. The old colonizing models that the Church deployed in order to be relevant have become outmoded and increasingly seen for what they are—tools of American cultural imperialism. Working this complicated relationship out between the financially robust American church and its impoverished borderlands is the most pressing issue facing the Mormon Church today.

NOTES:

[1] Heaton, T. 2010. Religion, sexually risky behavior, and reproductive health: The Mormon case in *Religion, Families, and Health*, edited by Christopher Ellison & Robert Hummer, New Jersey: Rutgers: 372.

[2] Eliason, E. A. 2001. *Mormons and Mormonism: An introduction to an American world religion*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press: 64.

[3] Ibid. 186.

[4] Bushman, C. 2006. Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in modern America. Westport: Greenwood. 108.

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Reflections on EXPONENT II

What has *Exponent II* meant to you? How has it impacted your life? What articles have meant the most to you and why? What do you hope *Exponent II* will address or accomplish in the next forty years?"

SUZETTE SMITH OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA WRITES:

Exponent II means "gathering" to me. In the words of this magazine and in the sharing of our stories—we gather our voices, our strength, our courage, our pain, our experience, our love—and ultimately, we find that we have power in all the parts that we are—as women. I've gained many insights into life and into my spirituality through reading the *Exponent II* magazine. One that stands out is a poem: *"My Story"* by Kathy Weizinger, published in Fall 2010. The poem tells of a woman trying to fit into a small space to find God. The message resonated with me because I don't fit in that small space either. It ends so hopefully: "Yet, my head is free - My arms - My hands - To reach - To explore - To embrace God in all of the places that He is." I hope the magazine will go on just as it is—telling the powerful stories of women in their struggle and in their faith. And I hope that our readership will grow and grow until all women can be inspired by the words and we can claim the ordination and the keys that are ours.

CAROLYN NIELSEN FROM HINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS SAYS:

I am a long-term member of the *Exponent II* community and at the same time, a mostly peripheral one. My introduction to *Exponent II* came in the summer of 1976 when we first moved to Boston. While we were temporarily living in Jim and Connie Cannon's basement, Connie told me about *Exponent II*. My immediate reaction was, "This is great! These are my kind of people." I expected to join in with the founding mothers and help with the newspaper.

Life's circumstances did not allow me to follow through. I did read the newspaper for quite a few years, all the time wishing I had a more direct involvement but never able to make the pieces fit. Somewhere along the years, I let my subscription lapse. Finally, in 1996, twenty years after my introduction to *Exponent II*, I made it to Hillsboro for my first Exponent II retreat. I had a wonderful time and determined that I would come back the next year and every following year. This was an experience not to be missed.

Fast forward to 2014. Who knows what got in the way but it took me another nineteen years to actually return for my second retreat.

The disciplinary actions taken by the Church this past summer left me feeling dismayed and distraught. I am still working through my feelings and wrestling with what actions, if any, I will take. I had no question, though, where to find refuge, thoughtfulness, and understanding. It had been a long time, but I knew

that *Exponent II* was still there and that I could pick up right where I left off. I immediately renewed my lapsed subscription, sent a gift subscription to my daughter, and made certain to attend the 2014 retreat. I knew I would be welcome. I knew I would be surrounded by thoughtful women who are unafraid to explore the complexities of our spirituality and our lives as Mormon women. I am grateful beyond words that the wonderful women of Exponent have been there for me in the past, are here for me now, and will be with me as we proceed into the future together.

SOPHIA MASON FROM MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE SAYS:

I discovered *Exponent II* this summer as my family grappled with this wave of Mormon feminism. Much of what my parents taught me led me to call myself a feminist and advocate for all people's rights. Like EFH wrote in her article, "A Place at the Table Behind Closed Doors" in last spring's issue, I feel that Mormonism also made me a feminist. One of my most prized possessions right now is the signed thank you note the *Exponent II*'s editors sent me after they printed a work of art I submitted alongside EFH's article. The magazine has encouraged me to think critically about my religion *and* to nurture my religiosity, and it has given me a host of new examples of how my sisters do that.

PANDORA BREWER OF MOUNT PROSPECT, ILLINOIS WRITES:

My first encounter with *Exponent II* was in July 1990. I was 27 years old and 9 months pregnant with my first baby. A friend encouraged me to go to the retreat and I went reluctantly. I had a bad attitude about nearly everything that summer. It was obvious that I had valiantly performed the prescribed script for my life. I had gone to BYU, married a Mormon boy, was supporting his education and now starting a family. I should have felt aligned with my universe and instead my choices felt imposed, stifling, and much more difficult in practice than in my imagined narrative. I was angry. Angry at the Church, my husband, even questioning having a child amid all the uncertainty I was feeling.

So I walked into the *Exponent II* retreat thinking I would just sit under a tree and write in my journal. What I discovered was a community of women wrestling with and, more importantly, willing to talk about similar struggles. I listened to many individual stories—each unique in their detail, yet when woven together, enveloped me with the warmth of common experience. I talked to women younger, older, and much older, basking in their generous acceptance and advice. Laughing, sharing, walking, singing, many hands carried and soothed my worries that weekend. Going back home, even to the same routines, I was different knowing that I was known and that I was not alone.

Over time, attending the retreat, reading the *Exponent II* paper, I always feel this renewed sense of connection. I often feel too secular for the spiritual world and too spiritual for the secular world. *Exponent II* is my "just right" place. I show up as my messy self, and my sisters and I speak our pain, write our dreams and assure each other that tomorrow will be better—in language and love that is true, real and sustaining.

DAWN PARRETT THURSTON OF VILLA PARK, CALIFORNIA WRITES:

I moved from Boston shortly before the birth of *Exponent II* and was an early subscriber because I knew and admired many of the women on the first editorial staff. My confidence and sense of self had dipped after a marriage at age 19 and, early on, *Exponent II* was a lifeline, inspiration, and mentor to my emerging feminist sensibilities. I've occasionally published articles in the magazine and still hungrily read each issue—usually within a few days of receiving it. Long before the Internet, *Exponent II* was the only resource I knew of that kept me in touch with other like-minded women. My thanks to the hundreds of generous writers and editors who have contributed to this consistently professional, thought-provoking resource for the diverse family of women associated with Mormonism."

CAROLINE SALISBURY FROM PASADENA, CALIFORNIA WRITES:

As a young woman, I always had questions and sensed the inequality of the patriarchal system that surrounded me. My "feminist awakening" blew up like a bomb in late 2007 and started an unquenchable fire for knowledge and clarity that continues to this day. One of the first places I turned to for answers, insight and opinion was *Exponent II*. I poured over every page, read every back issue, clicked on every comment as though I could imbibe the collective wisdom of all the many years and many authors who contribute to the living, breathing record of women's thought. I have overflowing gratitude for the writers and thinkers who are always able to take the same heart-twisting questions I have and eloquently make sense of it all. I have shared your words of wisdom with friends and leaders, most recently Jennifer Finlayson-Fife's article, "Moderating the Mormon discourse on Modesty." I have no doubt that many more women are searching for answers to their questions. These women will need the *Exponent II* to help them navigate confusing ideas, especially against a backdrop of faith. The magazine/blog stands on the shoulders of the giants who formed it, from Louisa and Emmeline to Claudia and Laurel. Perhaps the next generation of giants is reading it on their grandmother's bedside table and clicking to articles linked from Facebook. I would love to see *Exponent II* nurture these newcomers by showcasing primer-level and classic articles.

PAGE TURNER OF ROANOKE, VIRGINIA WRITES:

Exponent II is a respectful environment where I felt I could be unabashedly authentic for the first time. I love to read the perspective of my sisters that are thinking and actively engaging in introspection, creativity and compassion. Since beginning my involvement with *Exponent II*, I am holding my head high and embracing my authentic Mormon identity.

SHERRIE MORREALL GAVIN OF QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA SAYS:

Exponent II has been a lifeline to me in many ways. The by-line, "Am I not a woman and a sister"— mirroring the call to the end of slavery, and absent of anything in relationship to motherhood—brought a sense of belonging and safety to me. As a very imperfect Mormon woman, *Exponent II* is still teaching me that Mormon womanhood is not necessarily reflected in what is taught at church on Sundays. I was seeking for this when I found *Exponent II*, and I need it to sustain me in the Mormon Church. *Exponent II*'s non-traditional and intellectual, yet powerfully devout expression of faith is a liberating and celestial concept that has sustained me as I seek my own unique and personal relationship with Christ and the Church.

The Exponent blog has also been a safe place for me to explore my relationship with Christ, and a place where I have been able to develop a sense of religious femininity that is based on faith, outside of gender and reproductive capability. The articles that have meant the most to me are the lesson plans; I know that if I am teaching a lesson, there is a superb and insightful lesson plan at *The Exponent* that is reflective of the experience of women, and that will bring the Spirit.

In the future, I'd like *Exponent II* to become more international; I would love for the women of the world-wide Church to feel at home in the Exponent community and hope that these women will contribute a much-needed dimension to the Church through *Exponent II*. By sharing their stories, we can gain global sisterhood that is based on Christ, yet is removed from the reproductive, "nurturing," and North American lenses that presume and prescribe the understanding of womanhood within a traditional Mormon context.

JUDY CURTIS OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA WRITES:

As newlyweds in 1963, my husband and I arrived in Cambridge to begin graduate school. We attended the

Cambridge ward where I met the women who founded *Exponent II* a few years later. They were my friends and mentors—Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (who told me to read *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that changed how I saw my life), Judy Dushku, Claudia Bushman, Grethe Peterson, Carrel Sheldon, Bonnie Horne, Carolyn Peters and others.

About the time we left in 1969, they were having planning meetings for the publication which I attended, so I knew it was coming and subscribed from the very beginning. Over the years I had submissions published, and gave gift subscriptions to family and friends.

When retreats began, I looked forward to attending. I was living in the Las Vegas area at the time. A friend and I even organized a retreat there one year. We had it all planned and ready to go, but local Church leaders, when they learned of it, made a public announcement telling the men not to let their wives attend, so it didn't happen. In those days the Church was often openly antagonistic towards non-correlated Mormon publications like *Exponent II*, *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*. But these publications kept my husband and me in the Church because they gave us a like-minded community where we were able to deal with problematic issues knowing we weren't alone.

With the help of *Exponent II* we reared our five children to be feminists as well. And who would have guessed that one day a daughter-in-law would be the Managing Editor of the magazine. I consider that a great blessing. *Exponent II* has paved the way for changes that are coming for women in the Church—changes that will bring all of us greater sisterhood and equality as our culture evolves into a true Zion.

NEXT SISTERS SPEAK QUESTION:
MORMON FEMINISTS AND TEMPLE RECOMMENDS

Several years ago when I was newly married, I had a temple recommend interview with my bishop. I breezed through most of the questions, but when he asked about whether I lived up to my temple covenants, I responded, "Well, I don't hearken unto my husband. That doesn't work for me." The bishop was a bit puzzled, replied something about how that covenant in the temple isn't all that different than what Paul says in the New Testament, but I reasserted again that I would not be hearkening unto my husband. The bishop shrugged, moved on, and signed my recommend.

Since then, there have been years when I have decided to not pursue a recommend. I don't love the dynamic of being asked these personal questions by men I barely know, and I struggle with the temple anyway. So it was easy to decide to bypass the recommend process. However, a part of me wished I had a recommend. I knew I would have more credibility in my Mormon community if I did, and therefore more opportunities to serve and help others in my ward.

As a Mormon feminist, what are your thoughts about holding a temple recommend? Do you think temple recommends hurt Mormon feminists by giving leaders something to hold over feminists' heads, or do you feel they help Mormon feminists by giving them important credibility within their communities? How have you handled the trickier questions in the interview about belief, affiliation, covenant keeping, and more? Have these interviews been good experiences for you?

EXPONENT II REVISITED PICK:
SELECTED BY SUE BOOTH-FORBES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF 1984-1997

"Don't Look to Me for Direction" is the prize-winning personal essay in which Claudia Harris takes us on her journey to discover who she is, who she wants to be as she grows older, and how she learns to use her own authentic voice. While belying her own title, she gives us a wonderful example of how to move through the ups and downs of our lives, accumulating wisdom and insight along the way. I find Claudia's essay influential because she is open and honest about her vulnerabilities, doubts, and questions, and humble about and generous with her insights and her wisdom.

One of the most precious moments of my time as editor was meeting with the General Relief Society President during which time we discussed at length how important it is for Mormon women to claim their voices and share their lives, to tell their stories without fear of shame, judgement, or condemnation. We also recognized that, while our approaches may be different, they complemented and supported each other as we moved toward our mutual goal. *Exponent II*'s long-used tag line "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?" asks for us to be heard. Even though Claudia has asked us not to look to her for direction, she shows and encourages us to tell our stories and to use our voices so that we—with all our questions, vulnerabilities, faith, and wisdom—can help to turn that question into a declarative statement, "I Am a Woman and a Sister!"

DON'T LOOK TO ME **FOR DIRECTION**

By Claudia W. Harris • Vol. 14 No. 3 Winter 1988

(This essay has been edited for length.)

People are always asking me for directions. This morning when I was out for my morning walk, three drivers stopped to use me for a road map. I suppose, because I'm out there on the street moving along at a determined clip, they assume that I know where I'm going, but it's probably not good for them to also assume that I know where they're going. In fact, it's not wise to assume that I know where I'm going in any but the most literal sense. I can tell you where I've been, and I can tell you what my big goal is, what my eternal aspirations are, but bogged down as I frequently am in the mundane, I sometimes miss the signposts that would tell me where I'm headed.

For that reason, I feel like a sham when I become aware that others are looking to me for directions. And the older I get, the oftener I find myself in that role. Here I think of myself as still thoroughly involved in the process of becoming, and others see me as having

already become. Perhaps I'm too sensitive, but I find myself less ready to contribute in Relief Society because I suspect what I say is given more importance than it merits. I'm resisting, and resenting a little, this elder-statesman role that has come to me much too soon.

One Saturday morning recently, I was teaching the in-service lesson to our ward's coterie of Primary workers, which that morning consisted of eight eager young women. The subject I had chosen was self-esteem. To stress the importance of this principle for their young charges, I focused on the teachers themselves. We ended the meeting with a strength group in which each person in the circle named her own strengths and then the others bombarded her with what they saw as her strengths. This experience can be a confirming experience, as it was that morning, but it can also be quite revealing. I was intrigued by what these young women said were my strengths. They described the role that they expected me to play more than who I really am. Deference can be very lonely; I ended up feeling more apart. The separation was definable by small things like calling me "Sister Harris" but using first names for everyone else. Here I had felt like their contemporary, struggling as they were to make my way, but they saw me as this mythical person who had somehow already arrived. After the meeting, one of these young women hugged me, telling me sweetly how I reminded her of her mother. Older sister I could have lived with easily, but mother!

After that experience, I must say I walked slower for a while. Sometimes you're not only as old as you feel; you're as old as other people think you are. My most recent birthday, my 46th, clearly places me on the downhill side; none of my relatives even lived to be 80. But that isn't what's gotten to me. I enjoy being my age, even though I hear a few more creaks than I used to. I love being the mother of adults, and I revel in being a grandmother. If I'm suffering from a mid-life crisis, it's only in relationship to how others react to my advancing age. Because I married when I was eighteen, many people assume by looking at my three grown children that I'm older than I am. For that reason, I freely tell my age. When someone exclaims in surprise, however, "Oh, I never would have believed it!" I want to scream back, "46 is not old!" But then I remember my own perspective at 20: I thought my life would be over at this point, not that it would just be beginning.

So despite how much I might resist the uncomfortable realization, I probably am more at the point of having become. The older I get the more limited my possibilities appear to be. One choice precludes another, and soon a path has been set that I did not anticipate. For example, I probably will never play the cello again, the one that I lugged around throughout elementary and high school, enduring jokes about getting it under my chin or marching with the band. When I was a senior, I quit orchestra to take debate, regretting the decision immediately. However, because I knew that I neither had the talent nor the persistence to play really well, I gave it up with some relief, not appreciating how much pleasure I could have gotten from playing for myself or with friends. Now, after years of saying that I was going to play the cello again, I have at last admitted that I probably never will.

I can talk about cello playing because it is one of the least painful decisions that I could put in this class. There are many other choices that contribute to this person I have become and that more importantly cancelled out other choices and limited me in ways I did not foresee or consciously choose. I'm on the road, but it's not a well-defined path with an iron rod along it. My early life prepared me for a true-false test, not the multiple choice one confronting me. For others to look at my life, and see it as anything but the haphazard creation that it is, embarrasses me.

I'm frustrated when other women compare my life to theirs and decide we have little in common. They assume that my life reflects all my values. I wish it did. There just doesn't seem to be time to do everything possible. I wish I'd had twelve children so I could enjoy the expanded circle of love and the unselfishness and the many skills that experience would have brought me. I wish I'd written a wonderful novel or dedicated myself to art or law or politics. I want to be able to live almost all women's lives; I certainly want all their positive

experiences. That's my fantasy Celestial Kingdom, I suppose: not only to have all knowledge but also to have all experience, to fully understand what it would have been like to have lived out all the various possibilities. I want to be every woman I could have become had I made other choices.

"The danger in having almost become is that I might not recognize new directions that are open to me. If my inner age changes too radically with all this buffeting by reality, I might begin to think of myself as unchangeable, as too old or too comfortable the way I am. I want to always feel on the brink, to be ready at any moment to learn something new, to be flexible in mind and spirit as well as body."

The danger in having almost become is that I might not recognize new directions that are open to me. If my inner age changes too radically with all this buffeting by reality, I might begin to think of myself as unchangeable, as too old or too comfortable the way I am. I want to always feel on the brink, to be ready at any moment to learn something new, to be flexible in mind and spirit as well as body. Otherwise, I might not be like my friend LaVerne who realized at 78 that not only must she get a driver's license but that she was also not too old to learn. She called up an instructor, arranged lessons, passed the test, and has been driving now for four years. True, she acted out of desperation when her sister, the driver in the family, developed Alzheimer's disease, but much of my best learning has been in response to just that sort of desperation.

And so, what is the answer? When people ask, I really do try to send them in the best direction, even though I sometimes resent being interrupted in my own struggle along difficult terrain. But I also try to be much more open about my unsureness and the details of my struggle. Even though it's comfortable to think righteousness makes life easy, all I can attest to is that it makes life easier. Gone are the days when I pretended that life was a breeze and that going uphill was just as much fun as downhill.

One positive thing that age has given me is perspective; I know now that the times I most value in retrospect are those times when the struggle was toughest because that was when my learning was greatest. But I also don't go looking for trouble. The gospel gives me a picture to follow—even if it isn't a well-defined road map—and I am grateful for those times when my choices seemed clearly inspired. I have felt the concern and enjoyed the involvement of many from both sides of the veil. I am also relieved that I have arrived at this point with only a few regrets. So look to me for direction at your own risk, but join me on the walk any time you'd like.

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Soon after writing this piece, my life fell apart. My sister, her husband, and two sons died in an automobile accident in Spanish Fork Canyon. I suffered a nine-month illness that, when it was finally diagnosed, led me to think briefly that my own death was imminent. This frustrating period was immediately followed by my husband's diagnosis of cancer. His predicted six months blessedly stretched to eighteen. Just before his death, my nephew's 20-year-old bride died after a six-week bout with recurring cancer. After her four cancer-free years, we were totally unprepared. Interspersed in all this were biopsies and successful cancer operations of several other loved ones.

Because I have now become that most dreaded of all things—a widow—I decided to see if this essay on my discomfort with having almost become still expresses my feelings. I laugh as I read of my desire to stay on the brink of possibility because I'm now perched uneasily on an abyss of confusion. Anything is possible except

what I spent 30 years building. What were comfortable givens are now all open questions. Too much choice is hell. My life then seemed clearly mapped out compared to the uncharted territory opening up before me now. I find that I don't delight in change quite as much as I once indicated.

While my husband was recovering from his first operation, I taught his Gospel Doctrine class. Word of the dismal prognosis had spread quickly, so when a sister came up to me one Sunday after class, I expected her either to express sympathy or say something about the lesson. Instead she looked at me hard and said, "I've got my eye on you; everyone has their eye on you." She then told me angrily of her own husband's poor health and of her fear that she might one day be in my position. "Women all over are watching to see how you handle it," she said. I'm sure she had no clue how devastated and alone she left me standing. At the same time, I remembered this essay and wanted to shout: "Don't look to me for direction!"

I wish I had a dollar for every time these last few years someone has told me that I'm "strong." However kind, the remark robs me of my emotion; it tells me what's expected. Recently, I was with a group of women, and one was sharing some lovely memory of my husband. Tears began to well up in my eyes; I so love knowing others appreciated him and miss him, too. But when I realized a particular sister was carefully watching my reaction, I involuntarily closed down. My tears dried, and I felt my face take on the pleasant mask that I usually wear in public. This sister has told me repeatedly how well I'm doing and that she would never be able to manage. I'm sure she doesn't believe me when I tell her that she could do whatever she had to do and that all I've managed to do is put one foot in front of another.

It really is difficult, however, to know what to say to someone in my position. There are no pat answers. Simple expressions of love and caring and especially touching have helped. I cringe now when someone, with the best of intentions, says something unhelpful to me that in the past I have said under similar circumstances; I had also thought it would be comforting until I experienced the remark myself.

I can no longer say that I enjoy being my age, nor can I hide it—I had it carved on the tombstone. Still mine is an awkward age—both too young and too old. I'm too young just to sit in my rocking chair enjoying my grandchildren; I need to build a career for myself. But I'm also too old to be thrust out into the world, alone for the first time in my life. New beginnings are not quite as exciting as my essay led me to believe. In no other period of my life have I learned as much, but although I'm blessed by the knowledge, I'll probably never delight in it. I'll always curse the circumstances. I'm tired of growing. I'll always remember my reaction when, soon after my husband's death, I received insurance information indicating that my expected life span was 35 more years. It seemed like an unbearable life sentence. But my life is not unpleasant when I remember what I've learned about being happy despite my situation. As long as I stay in the present, I can take pleasure in the moment—a step back in time, I feel regret; a step forward, fear. And I've begun to recapture my zest for living. The time stretching before me seems more like a gift now than a burden. I've also begun to appreciate some of the new possibilities open to me. When I keep my eyes on the present scene—not on the ground but also not straining to see the distant horizon—I can even smell a rose or two.

"Anything is possible except what I spent 30 years building. What were comfortable givens are now all open questions. Too much choice is hell. My life then seemed clearly mapped out compared to the uncharted territory opening up before me now. I find that I don't delight in change quite as much as I once indicated."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF *THE EXPONENT* BLOG:

NEARLY A DECADE OF ONLINE DISCUSSION AND FRIENDSHIP

One very important thing the blog and Exponent II *has given me and others—beloved friends who are there to make us strong when we are weak and discouraged.*

By Caroline Kline • Irvine, California

Ten years ago, I found *Exponent II* through my visiting teachee Jana Remy, who handed me a stack of her mother's *Exponent II*s. I was entranced, and with Jana's help, I threw myself into the organization, offering to edit with Jana a Southern California issue of the paper and then offering to start, again with Jana, a blog for *Exponent II*. It was 2005, and I felt strongly that a blog would help connect the organization to a new generation of younger Mormon feminist women who were discovering the world of online Mormon forums. Since the blog would be unfettered by geographical boundaries and available to anyone with a computer and an internet connection, I saw its potential to draw Mormon feminists from around the country looking for a forum to discuss their questions and experiences. The blog could also be the means of introducing Mormon women who had never heard of the *Woman's Exponent* or the *Exponent II* publication to this important legacy and tradition of Mormon feminism.

The Exponent blog launched in January of 2006, and has thrived since then, featuring a new post almost every single day. While blog posts differ from the carefully curated, edited, and lengthier essays in the magazine, the blog medium also offers some advantages. I love the immediacy of blogs that can respond to, highlight, and host discussions of important events within hours of the events themselves. I've also always loved the democratic feeling of blogs, where authors can write their experiences and questions, and commenters from around the world can agree or disagree and share their own thoughts in turn. This democratic spirit, this hierarchy-bending forum in which readers become authors and authors become readers, this forum for real discussion and sharing, has personally fed my soul and inspired me throughout the years.

"This democratic spirit, this hierarchy-bending forum in which readers become authors and authors become readers, this forum for real discussion and sharing, has personally fed my soul and inspired me throughout the years."

Perhaps the greatest contribution of *The Exponent* blog throughout the years has been the posting of lesson plans for Relief Society lessons, an idea of founding blogger Deborah Farmer Kris. Since the *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church* manuals only featured authoritative male voices, we felt that lesson plans could

Exponent II Retreat 2013, photos by Stefanie Carson-Nickolaisen • Mesa, Arizona

help teachers all over the world inject quotes from women and ask thoughtful and inclusive questions. These lesson plans have been an unmitigated success, as thousands of Mormon women have used them to help construct their Sunday lessons. Year after year, it is these lesson plans that draw the largest number of hits to our blog. Recently we have also begun posting Visiting Teaching lesson ideas as well as Young Women lesson ideas, and we have no doubt that these lesson plans are likewise helping to raise the level of conversation in our classrooms and homes, as well as introducing ever more women to the *Exponent II* organization.

Ultimately, for many of us, the real boon of blogging for *Exponent II* has been the relationships we have developed with other bloggers and commenters. Through the blog, online associations have become real-life, life-changing friendships, and at times when I might have felt utterly alone in my questions or pain, I have had the blog and blogging friends to turn to for support and advice. I'll never forget the day when I didn't know whether I should move forward with efforts to hold my baby in the sacrament meeting for his baby blessing, given my bishop's disapproval and strong advice that I not do it. Feeling discouraged, I turned to my blog friends for advice, and within an hour I had 20 messages telling me to move forward, to think of what I would wish I had done when I look back on my life, and to push past my fear and hold my child. With their support, I gathered up my courage and did so. This is one very important thing the blog and *Exponent II* has given me and others—beloved friends who are there to make us strong when we are weak and discouraged.

As we begin to close in on our ten year anniversary from the founding of the *The Exponent* blog, I am hopeful that more women searching for thoughtful conversation on gender issues will find the blog and become a part of the *Exponent II* community. If the last ten years are any indication, we have a bright future before us.

40 YEARS OF *Mormon Feminism*

Our Cambridge group was excited and inspired by the example of our nineteenth-century sisters which resonated with second-wave feminism then cresting across the country. We hoped, perhaps naively, that these discoveries would be welcomed by Church members at all levels and would provide a platform from which Mormon women could reclaim their heritage of making contributions within the home, and beyond it in the wider world. | By Judy Dushku • Watertown, Massachusetts

In 1890, the LDS Church leaders who controlled the Utah Territory agreed to a swap. The Federal government would grant full statehood to Utah and cease the seizure of Church assets in return for a pledge from Mormon leaders that polygamy would end and that the Latter-Day Saints would become law-abiding citizens. Though it took a couple of painful decades to effectuate the pledge, by 1910 plural marriage had been all but eradicated from public Mormon life. National leaders and the American public expressed relief that this "relic of barbarism" was gone at last.

But accounts of the actual status of polygamous women in the "Great Basin Kingdom" tell a very different story. Latter-day Saints considered the practice the defining emblem of their having been chosen to live a practice intended for God's most righteous followers. Women who practiced "the principle" (as the practice was called) were continuously praised and held up as role models of righteous discipleship by their male leaders. Many of these sisters were accorded a great deal of responsibility and independence in helping to build the Mormon Kingdom. Their women's organization, the Relief Society, was totally separate from the official Church organization, and separate Relief Society Halls were built next to Mormon chapels. The Relief Society established hospitals and nursing programs, systematically stored grain in large granaries, created milk depots for children, and engaged in many other large-scale welfare activities. These high-profile, high responsibility roles for women, largely ended in the 20th century. And for many decades, they were totally forgotten.

When polygamy officially ended and Mormon leaders decided to show the world that the Saints could become "100% American," the status of polygamous wives declined. Now they were uncomfortable reminders of a practice which Mormon leaders no longer wanted discussed and which many Church members found somewhat embarrassing. As the 20th century proceeded, the Relief Society's independence was curtailed as it was gradually brought under the leadership of the all-male priesthood. So ironically, as polygamy was phased out, the status and opportunities afforded Mormon women actually diminished. While honored as "domestic goddesses," these women were no longer encouraged to establish hospitals, run for public office, or develop community-wide education and welfare programs as they had once been.

The Latter-day Saints of my parents' generation were born in those years when the Mormon challenge was to integrate into the established national culture as seamlessly as possible. My father went to college and studied radio broadcasting before enlisting in the Navy to fight in WWII, and served as a career military man after the war. My mother stayed at home to raise model American children. She served in the PTA and worked with third-graders in the community garden. They were devout Mormons, but we kept a low-profile in the communities where my father's military assignments took us. While we were living in Michigan, I remember standing up before my fifth-grade class, as my teacher held up photographs of "Mormon polygamists" at Short Creek, Arizona, that appeared on the cover of *LIFE* magazine. After she disdainfully railed at the "wretched looking cult-members" in the picture, I proudly stated that those were "my people," and they were not a cult. But when I related the incident to my parents, their response was not what I expected. They seemed more embarrassed than proud and told me that those polygamists had long since been drummed out of the Church. They were NOT "my people." My mother said I had to learn to be more quiet about our religion. We prayed and sang the hymns of Zion and gathered with the Saints. But we did not want to stick out. Possibly tired of the sensational image their unusual lifestyle had brought them, 20th-century Mormons became champions of the conventional, homogeneous culture that characterized America through the 1950s.

"My mother said I had to learn to be more quiet about our religion. We prayed and sang the hymns of Zion and gathered with the Saints. But we did not want to stick out."

My generation, born into this "Americanized" version of Mormonism, was approaching adulthood in the 1960s, when I began my graduate studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At this time, Cambridge, like Berkeley on the west coast, was the center of dynamic, student-led movements that questioned virtually all the post-war social and political conventions. Demands were raised to dramatically reorder race relations, to seriously challenge the government's ability to commit troops to imperialist wars, and to liberate women from

roles that restricted them solely to raising children. People looked forward, imagining new patterns for a better life, and also looked to the past for models that might again prove relevant.

I attended an LDS congregation outside of Harvard Square and often discussed what was going on around me with folks who gathered there to worship. I was not alone in wondering where Mormons fit in with these impulses for more freedom, equality and inclusion in American society. We talked about where we stood in the debate over emerging "revisionist" historical voices that were casting new light on traditional interpretations of the American story. Perhaps ours was one of many minority groups in the US that deserved a critical reassessment of the way it had been treated by historians inside and outside the Church.

Equally important was the related question of where women belonged in the history of the Mormon people. For example, feminist historians in Cambridge had asked some of us how it was that Utah women were among the first in the US to vote. The implication was that possibly these pioneer women were actually national leaders in the suffrage movement. Many of us came to realize that in order to know where we were going we had to know more about where we had been.

A group of Mormon women, mostly with academic backgrounds, was particularly invigorated by this line of thinking. Starting in the late 1960s, we gathered frequently to search out and discuss historical information about our past. We consciously decided to employ feminist perspectives to help us evaluate the information we were learning about Mormon women's history. We gave ourselves book and article assignments and shared the information we gleaned. But we were disappointed with the paucity of solid, factual, recorded information on this critical subject.

Then one fall day in 1974, a member of our group, Susan Kohler, went poking around the basement shelves of Widener Library at Harvard University. Below bound books about Mormon pioneers she found unbound yellowed newsprint pages of a newspaper then unknown to us. It was called the *Woman's Exponent*, and it was published in early Utah by and about women. She checked it out and walked it over to the Mormon chapel on Longfellow Park where we met. She excitedly laid it out and we exclaimed over its contents. It was the missing key that unlocked the history we had been seeking.

The *Woman's Exponent* was published from 1872-1910. Unlike the the domestically bound women often featured in the *Relief Society Magazine* of our generation, the *Woman's Exponent* authors sounded like bold and strong women who simultaneously proclaimed the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *and* the good news of the new place God intended women to occupy among these "chosen people." They spoke confidently about being leaders in Zion, secure in the knowledge that they were essential to the well-being of the Saints of Deseret.

"Many writers in the *Woman's Exponent* claimed that their newly restored religion had liberated women from centuries of oppression. They testified that spiritual light regarding an enhanced role for women in society was part of the truth that had been brought forth by the prophet Joseph Smith."

And there were so many of them! The scope of this publication was astoundingly broad. Page after page of the *Woman's Exponent* featured articles written by women about literature, caring for children, the importance of fine arts, grain farming and saving, wool processing from sheep, preserving foods, and caring for the sick, among many other topics. To our surprise, there were also articles about women's suffrage being essential to democracy and advocating the vote for Utah's women. They wrote about the rights of women

in other parts of the world and congratulated women as far away as India on triumphs they experienced. Many writers in the *Woman's Exponent* claimed that their newly restored religion had liberated women from centuries of oppression. They testified that spiritual light regarding an enhanced role for women in society was part of the truth that had been brought forth by the prophet Joseph Smith. Belying the frequent accusations that Mormon women under polygamy were enslaved like chattel, their words assured us that many of them understood working as equals with men to be a natural phenomenon.

This spirit of confident optimism and sense of purpose that carried these women through the trek across the plains and then the "kingdom building" phase of Utah Mormon history, was positively shocking to us as we sat and read about it in Cambridge in 1974. We felt we had uncovered a treasure that the whole Church would undoubtedly want to know about. We were amazed that we had never heard of this publication in all the Mormon historical materials we had reviewed. Was it possible that no one in Utah had kept copies? Were we the lucky ones to find it preserved by Harvard University?

We consulted Church scholars in Utah and found that the *Woman's Exponent* was known in a small historical circles. We were delighted to hear that contemporary historians knew that Brigham Young and the other male leaders had supported and encouraged the *Woman's Exponent*, and supported many of the major women-led 19th century initiatives. But historians could not explain why this important fact had not appeared in official LDS Church publications or been referenced in any official talk by a Mormon leader in our century.

Our Cambridge group was excited and inspired by the example of our nineteenth-century sisters which resonated with second-wave feminism then cresting across the country. We were also encouraged by the positive responses we received from the sisters in our wards with whom we shared our discoveries. We hoped, perhaps naively, that these discoveries would be welcomed by Church members at all levels, and would provide a platform from which Mormon women could reclaim their heritage of making contributions within the home, and beyond it in the wider world. It now seemed to us that the range of articles in the official LDS *Relief Society Magazine* that we had all been raised on, reflected a very confined view of women's roles. Our contemporary LDS culture now seemed almost un-Mormon in light of its origins.

As we looked at ways to share the spirit of confidence and initiative exemplified by our nineteenth-century sisters, we decided to start another newspaper by and about Mormon women. To honor the *Woman's Exponent*, we called our new publication *Exponent II*. The first issue came out in 1974.

The response from some of our Church leaders in Salt Lake City to our new publication was an unwelcome surprise. From local and Church-wide pulpits, priesthood leaders railed against the principles and practices of contemporary feminism. Had we anticipated that our Church leaders would not welcome our publication, we might have considered strategies that women working in other organizations were developing to move ahead without the collaboration of men in positions of power. But we were Mormon enough to believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was different from a university or a corporation.

We couldn't understand how our church leaders could ignore the record of remarkable achievement produced by our pioneer brethren and sisters working together, often playing mutually supportive roles. We saw this century-old model as self-evidently relevant to contemporary policy toward women in the Church. Why were millions of devoted, well-educated Mormon women being denied the chance to make the impactful contributions of their forbearers? Why were we discouraged from discussing our Heavenly Mother, whose existence had been affirmed in a beloved Mormon Hymn by Zion's Poet Laureate and wife of Brigham Young, Eliza R. Snow? Why were sisters who proposed praying to this loving heavenly parent being threatened with excommunication? We spent the next

several years trying to understand why this heroic history was no longer attractive to the leaders of the Church.

At last the answer became clear. Our Church leaders had come to view the second wave of feminism, or Women's Liberation Movement, as it was sometimes called, as a radical threat to the "family values" they espoused. The official Church became actively involved in opposing feminist initiatives all over the country. As we continued to share our enthusiasm for Mormon women's history with the Saints and with the wider world, some Church officials launched a persistent campaign aimed at wiping us out. From 1976 until the end of the century, our work was met with a strong rebuff from Salt Lake City. Many women were criticized and threatened with ecclesiastical punishment through the next 25 years, and in many ways this trend continues.

While it was painful to learn that some of our church leaders considered us, in certain respects, to be the enemy, we were buoyed with the knowledge that we were not entirely alone. To our lasting appreciation, Leonard Arrington, the official Church Historian, gave us a hearty welcome and room to work at his office in Salt Lake, although Church policy prevented him from paying us for our work. Much good history came out of that union of minds and hearts. Several scholars working under Arrington made signal contributions to Mormon women's history, even though that research was not a specific part of their job description. Jill Mulvay Derr went from Cambridge to Salt Lake and became a leading figure in Church history circles, publishing articles and books about Mormon women. Lavina Fielding (later Anderson), an editor at the *Ensign*, encouraged us to submit articles. Sadly, our articles were generally rejected by Lavina's superiors, but she too would publish significant work about women along with Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Linda Newell and others.

Meanwhile, the research we had done for an Institute class focused on teaching Mormon women's history was so substantive that we decided it needed preserving. With Claudia Bushman, then engaged in a history Ph.D program at the helm, our group wrote and edited essays for the book, *Mormon Sisters*. Claudia soon discovered that finding a publisher for the book was a tough sell. She was told privately that Deseret Book, the Church publishing house, "would not touch it with a ten foot pole." But with a determination reminiscent of her 19th century sisters, she found a way. The book was published in 1976 by "Emmeline Press" (essentially created by Claudia and other *Exponent II* women). It was later republished by Utah State University Press and has gone into many new editions and reprints. It was the first modern Mormon women's history about those who had lived in 19th century Utah. The book's excellent sales attest to the hunger of thousands of LDS women and men to learn of their buried past. In the ensuing years, hundreds of fine articles and books on Mormon women's history have been published. It seems that the more people learn about this proud history, the more they want to know.

Over the years, there were also moments of profound discouragement. After the 1993 excommunications of some of our dear friends in Utah who shared our feminist views, we felt even more besieged by powerful Church leaders who seemed bent on silencing us, even if it required excommunication. The Church that had once seemed such a bastion of comfort and solace now aroused pain, confusion and ambivalence. It became clear to us that for our ideas and discoveries to survive, we needed to turn to one another for support. We were to learn the wisdom of the now-famous statement of Gloria Steinem's: *"Any woman who chooses to behave like a full human being should be warned that the armies of the status quo will treat her as something of a dirty joke. That's their natural and first weapon. She will need her sisterhood."*

And the women of *Exponent II* have helped to create a feminist sisterhood. Each year since 1974 we have held an Exponent Retreat in some place of beauty and have invited any woman who wishes to join us, as we share research, writing, discussions, testimonies of Christ, and suggestions for how we can continue to support and nurture one another. Thousands of sisters have participated over the years. We are happy, as Mormons, to "stick out" in America, and increasingly happy to "stick out" in the Church, as we know that wherever we go, our very presence emboldens other women to stand up and acknowledge that we are "her people."

EXPONENT II REVISITED PICK:
SELECTED BY NANCY T. DREDGE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF 1975-1981, 2000-2009

I have long been a fan, admirer, and friend of Emma Lou Thayne. Her poetry and prose have graced the pages of *Exponent II* since its inception. She was the speaker at the third Exponent Day dinner. She and Laurel Ulrich wrote the "Dueling Banjos" column of East/West for many years. Her insightful poems have been a constant on *Exponent II*'s poetry page. During my second stint as editor of *Exponent II*, Emma Lou and I chatted often about what she was working on at the moment, and then she'd slip a few poems or a few thoughts in the mail to me.

A winner of award after award for literary and humanitarian accomplishments, Emma Lou preferred to be thought of as a simple, down-home person who loved tennis, the outdoors, and her cabin in the woods. And people, people, people. We see the down-home side of Emma Lou, her love for people (especially, in this case, her grandson Michael), and her common sense layered with wisdom in "It's About God." I love the images that appear effortlessly in Emma Lou's writing. In this piece, she draws on her parents' support of her tennis matches to comfort a grieving child and to explain how a loving Heavenly Father loves and supports us.

Nancy T. Dredge, 2014

IT'S ABOUT *God*

By Emma Lou Thayne and Michael Markosian • Vol 23 no. 2 Winter 2000

Dear Grandma,

Thank you for the cards and flowers but most of all the comfort you gave me the day of Louie's death.

I still have some questions and some grievances, though. Was Louie's dieing God's will? Did Louie have a soul, is he in heaven? What is God teaching me through Louie's death? How do I deal with the loneliness and suffering that this has brought me?

I know that you can help me answer these questions. Please write back.

Love,
Michael

***

When he's not there in the morning to snuggle,
Please Jesus, you be there.

When he's not by my side when I can't sleep,
Please Jesus, you be there.
When he doesn't meow for water at night,
Please Jesus, you be there.

Please fill the void that this
will leave
With your love.
He was my comfort
He was my best friend.
Please Jesus, you be there.

***

"Exactly how the cosmic game of being born, living, and dying is set up I can't be sure, only that I never doubt the love and caring implicit in the watching from high up in some non-earthly bleachers."

Dear Michael,

It's about God. Here I sit in my dear old rocking chair "perch" under the pines, breathing in the canyon morning so obviously offered by the hand of the God I so thoroughly believe in. How could such beauty be otherwise created?

That our time here is brief and often touched with sorrow like the loss of Louie or the death of your grandpa Markosian is part of some ineffable happening over which we have little—if any—control and which God observes with sometimes the same pain we experience.

Maybe this is very like how my father was in watching our tennis matches as we grew up. Somehow I've always believed in a Father in Heaven—and a Mother in Heaven—not unlike wondrous extensions of my own here on earth. They never missed one of my brothers' or my tennis matches, sitting often in the high bleachers at the old Salt Lake Tennis Club on 9th East. Tournaments, especially the finals in the late 1940s before we all married, attracted, like a baseball game, crowds that filled those covered bleachers.

Sometimes it was hard to spot our folks high up near the top, but we always knew they were there not missing a shot. Father, a great sportsman, had a motto that he sent us onto the court with: *Try hard, play fair, have fun*. We knew he'd be disappointed if we didn't do all three. And we knew he and Mother were rooting for us no matter how the game went.

Father watched with his own kind of attention. He kept columns in a notebook as the sets progressed: placements, errors, aces, double faults. We knew he did and that we could choose to see his fact sheet or not after the match. We knew the final score would have nothing to do with his or Mother's loving and welcoming us with open arms when we won or lost. Of course, how we played the game was up to us. He knew that we knew the rules, had practiced our strokes, and had been tutored in strategy. Our equipment was in good shape; my brother, Rick, strung rackets in our basement and kept the stringing at the right pressure in our wooden rackets to be kept in a press in damp weather to avoid warping. I washed, starched, and ironed our tennis shirts and shorts—even the shoelaces. I loved the sparkling clean feeling of going onto the court to hit the first white balls out of the can, opened by a key on top that fit a round of tin to curl off and release the so good smell of vulcanized rubber and the stiff fuzz of three brand new balls.

Of course, each match was a new challenge, sometimes scary, always exciting, and full of the dry mouth and sweat of wanting to do well. Down there on the recently rolled and lined clay court, with an umpire sitting on his mounted chair at the end of the net, we spun for serve, and the rest was up to us.

We knew that the sun would be bright and in our eyes on an overhead on one side; that the wind could come up and play havoc with a toss or a lob; that on a crucial point we could freeze with the nerves of a "steel elbow;" that confidence, always so tricky in competitive sports, would wax and wane, determining more than any skill who might win or lose.

Father and Mother knew all this, too, and would have loved to warn from the sidelines, "Don't lob into the wind" or "Keep your second serve solid but sure" or "Don't go for a winner 'til you have the right setup" or "Don't rush the net on a shallow approach shot." All of the "shoulds" and "oughts" and "never do's" they knew but simply had to watch as we played and made our best shots or pathetic errors. Still, we never doubted that they were there or that they watched with love and yes, no doubt sometimes aching, as we did what we could in that game we so much wanted to win.

When it was over, there they were, right there smiling, arms wide to take us in, knowing how much the game had meant, how much we'd wanted to win, telling us

"Great game" no matter what. Tears, disappointment over not playing well, frustration, embarrassment, even wanting to give up were acknowledged and understood, but never allowed to blot out the good shots, the good sportsmanship, the satisfaction of competing.

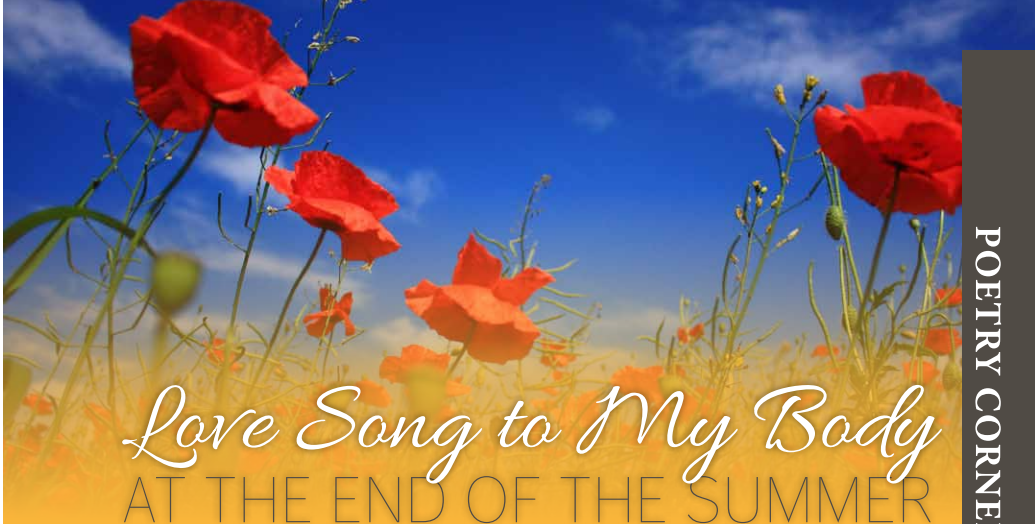
So, my wonderfully talented and thoughtful Michael, I feel exactly the same about a loving God who knows that a Louie has died and that a very dear child of his is suffering a terrible loss. Exactly how the cosmic game of being born, living, and dying is set up I can't be sure, only that I never doubt the love and caring implicit in the watching from high up in some non-earthly bleachers. And I also know with everything in me that the soul of each of us—and why not Louie?—will be welcomed with an understanding we can never begin to comprehend.

I loved your poem about your loneliness and grief over Louie's so tragic death and your invoking a loving Jesus to come to you. Oh, sweetie, I know he will. He is there, in private, "reaching our reaching." Keep that knowing with you, dear Michael, as a comfort in any game you play in this so beautiful and so unpredictable life.

Know how loved you are. And know how many of us both here and in Heaven are rooting for you.

I do love you, more maybe than you can possibly know.

Always,
Granma Grey
(Emma Lou Thayne)



Love Song to My Body AT THE END OF THE SUMMER

By Emma Lou Thayne

REPRINT FROM EXPONENT II VOL. 26 NO. 2 WINTER 2003

It is clear now, body, every day can be late August,
after the birth of babies, never quite cold.

But one must learn early what you are for forever.

Good old leather tiger, half domesticated
by paws in pans and shoulders hung too often with beaded fur,
you may think I forget. But you do not let me.
By now I know better. I come back.

Still, you never take me not surprised, faithful one,
by how to arrive, and the pleasure of sweat,
and how to shiver away the bee.

You move to the song behind the dance.
Even after a standard plain white, unstriped day,
you ripple in our sleep and wait, mostly unperplexed.

And when, no matter how faint, the music breathes
behind the catcalls of too much to do, you muster
almost without my inclining, potent as needing to dance,
to pace off the house, the garden of weeds, the clogged creek,
and the midnight clutch of vagrancies. You pad from
some spring, and wild, except for my importuning
go. To do it all.

When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there,
unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves.
August stashed in crisp piles above the dust.

I may find no way at all without your sleek taking.

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her alone."

FROM THINGS HAPPEN 1991
Thanks to my Healers, to the mystic connections between them and my health, I still feel loved and as if I have all the time in the world.

Have we made a DIFFERENCE?

Forty years! Imagine that! When we launched Exponent II *in 1974 we chose to print on newsprint because it was cheap and because, in truth, we probably thought of our offerings as fleeting. People could throw our sheet away or use it to start their morning's fire. We did not know that our words would start fires. But they did.*

Delivered by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in Cambridge, Massachusetts • September 12, 2014

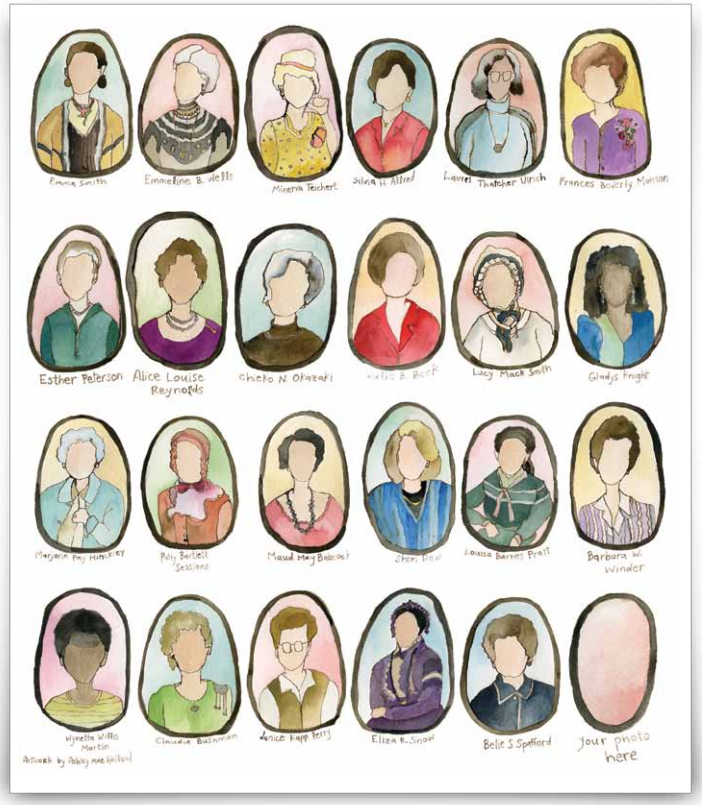
Over the past few weeks, I have been pondering the prospectus that Claudia Bushman included in the first issue of the paper and have been struck by three things—its forthright claim to a powerful nineteenth-century heritage, its open acknowledgement of a concern with then contemporary issues, and its bold declaration of our intentions.

Claudia made a claim to a nineteenth-century heritage by explaining the paper's audacious title. *Exponent II*, she explained, would be the successor to the *Woman's Exponent*, a woman's rights newspaper published in Utah from 1872 to 1912. "The discovery of this newspaper has meant a lot to women today," she said. "Our foremothers had spirit and independence, a liveliness their daughters can be proud of. Devoted mothers and wives, they tended their homes and children, helped support the family, and turned out a dynamic newspaper on the side. Can we do the same?"

By boldly declaring ourselves successors to an earlier generation of Mormon feminists, we skipped over more than 60 years of intervening history. The *Relief Society Magazine*, which succeeded the *Women's Exponent* in 1915, was discontinued in 1971. It was by then so dowdy and placid that nobody seemed to have noticed that it was gone. To us, things more than a century old seemed more up-to-date than the present. The same thing was happening to young feminists all over the United States as they gradually discovered lost histories of up-start women—women who offered some sort of guide and validation for what we were doing.

"*Exponent II* wasn't just about claiming the past. It was about expanding an already growing network that had been built through intense discussion about current issues."

Gently, but unmistakably, Claudia's preface also acknowledged the ferment around us. "The Mormon women of the Greater Boston area have been thinking and talking about Mormon women's issues for five years now," she wrote. "Our network of sisterhood grows constantly. Sisters write us from far off and come to visit our meetings. . . .we hope to catch more of our sisters in this net of common experience and understanding." She made clear that *Exponent II* wasn't just about claiming the past. It was about expanding an already growing network that had been built through intense discussion about current issues.



"Mormon Women" by Ashley Mae Hoiland • Palo Alto, California

The emphasis on "common experience and understanding" was crucial. Through discussion, we had already worked through many issues that had begun in 1970, long before we knew anything about the existence of the nineteenth-century paper whose name we would echo.

Claudia's prospectus ended with a statement of our goals: "*Exponent II*, poised on the dual platforms of Mormonism and Feminism, has two aims: to strengthen the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to encourage and develop the talents of Mormon women. That these aims are consistent we intend to show by our pages and our lives." Yes, we used the F-word. Admittedly, there was as yet no campaign against the term, but we weren't innocent of its meaning. We had done our reading. Feminism wasn't about hating men, or burning bras, or unisex bathrooms. It was about acknowledging inequity and trying to do something about it.

In the fourth issue, Claudia explained what it took to produce the paper. Those who participated have vivid memories of late night paste-up sessions at Carrel Sheldon's house in Arlington. At the time, an electric typewriter and sticky letters peeled from a translucent sheet were state-of-the-art equipment for do-it-yourself publishing. Using punch cards—and the expertise of Carrel's husband—it was possible to generate computerized address labels, but they had to be peeled off a sheet and stuck to the papers, which were then sorted in batches and carried to a local post office where cranky clerks complained. After describing the chaos of layout and the nightmare of mailing (a job that had produced two resignations in less than two issues), Claudia acknowledged that the staff had begun to get the hang of it, concluding cheerfully, "All of the above is prelude to saying that at the end of four issues the staff of *Exponent II* is exhilarated rather than crushed by our labors and look forward to many more issues in the future."

"There is a legend out there that we disappeared sometime in the late 20th century, only to re-emerge when the internet revived interests in feminism. I don't think that is an accurate portrayal either of the history of *Exponent II* or of a Mormon feminist history in general."

I doubt that anyone imagined that 40 years later *Exponent II* would be a slick magazine produced in brilliant color in print and online by a staff spread across the United States and led by co-editors Aimee Evans Hickman in Baltimore and Emily Clyde-Curtis in Phoenix. But some things remain the same. In describing the production of the first issues, Claudia added, "All of the labor is voluntary. . . the payment of even modest salaries would sink our ship in a hurry. Somehow it always works out that we pay, rather than get paid, to have our work published." *Exponent II* is never going to be a money-making venture, but the current Board believes that it is long past time to give our editors an honorarium for their work and reimbursement for their travel.

I know enough about fundraising to understand that any organization asking for support needs to have a clearly

articulated mission. That means taking ownership of its own story. Some might imagine the founding mothers of *Exponent II* as a feminist coven spawned in the People's Republic of Cambridge. Others might see us as a group of old ladies still hanging together with a handful of middle-aged acolytes at their side. If that is how our story gets told, then it is our fault. There is a legend out there that we disappeared sometime in the late 20th century, only to re-emerge when the internet revived interests in feminism. I don't think that is an accurate portrayal either of the history of *Exponent II* or of a Mormon feminist history in general. Our advantage is that we managed to survive most of the crises of our era and that our newspapers are now archived and accessible. I am thrilled that Nancy Dredge has begun compiling a detailed timeline of our history that will show changes in the topics that engaged us over time, but no retreat from providing a forum for women to share their concerns and ideas.

One of the most difficult tasks for any organization is to survive its founders. Very few do that successfully and we have a serious task as we begin a process of understanding our place in a larger history of Mormon feminism and of Latter-day Saint women. So when I was asked to give a talk celebrating our anniversary, I began to ask myself whether *Exponent II* has done more than survive, whether it has actually made a difference, and if so, what sort of difference and for whom? I have to admit I finally gave up trying to answer that question because to do so would mean moving outward from the paper itself to the lives of those who were affected by it.

"A credible history will acknowledge defeats as well as successes, conflict as well as harmony, abandoned efforts as well as triumphs."

To provide a credible answer to the question of whether *Exponent II* has made a difference would mean including all of the women and men who ever read or contributed to the paper as well as those who have been affected by them or their work. It would mean factoring in the contributions of *Exponent II* women as doctors, college professors, corporate executives, primary teachers, poets, engineers, nurses, advocates for the disabled, artists, good neighbors, and a Chief Justice of the Utah Supreme Court. *Exponent II* is an element in an enduring sisterhood connected by faith and tradition to generations who have come before us and to those who will follow. As a publication, *Exponent II* provides raw material for understanding the successes and the ongoing struggles of Latter-day Saint women over the past 40 years, but it also leads outward to biographies and histories that invite recovery and sharing, and of course a credible history will acknowledge defeats as well as successes, conflict as well as harmony, abandoned efforts as well as triumphs.

The invitation you received to this evening's event was adapted from a poster created by Ashley Mae Hoiland that she graciously allowed us to use as the cover of a recent issue. I like the assembly of portraits on the poster because they come from different generations and centuries and from different vantage points in relation to the Church. I also like the fact that she has connected all these generations by portraying these women without faces. In essence they are mirrors reflecting back on us. We can imagine ourselves not only in the blank oval at the bottom, but in all the other unfinished portraits. Each one is completed by what we know about the person and are willing to acknowledge and remember.

Several years ago, Karen and Karl Haglund conducted interviews with former members of the Cambridge Ward in Massachusetts for an oral history project Karl had helped launch. It is fascinating to see how often these interviews included memories related to *Exponent II*. Mimmu Sloan, for example, described being with Susan Kohler in Widener Library at Harvard University when they were doing research for an Institute class they had been asked to teach on early Mormon women. This was in the early 1970s, after the publication of the so-called "pink *Dialogue*." Mimmu recalled, "Susan Kohler was leaning against a bookcase. She turned around and said, 'What are these volumes that I am leaning against?' She read and said, '*Woman's Exponent*.' She pulled them out, and they were Mormon women! Nobody knew...I don't think it was completely random. I don't think it's a happenstance. I

think. . . we were directed to do our studies there." Susan probably remembers that occasion somewhat differently, but whether or not she and Mimmu agree on the precise details, for both of them this was a transformative experience.

Karen also interviewed Linda Kimball about her experiences as an undergraduate at Wellesley College in the years when *Exponent II* was getting started. Linda was introduced to Mormonism and feminism about the same time. Some of the first Church members she met were Exponent women. She remembered that Judy Dushku was "kind of the archetype of what a real Mormon woman was like. There were other women. Judy Gilliland, Claudia Bushman, Nancy Dredge—all these kind of original Mormon women that were strong, outspoken, lively, funny, and bright. I had hit pay-dirt! Boy, surprise, surprise when I left the sheltering arms of the University ward and found out that there are other ways to view what women can and should do. To find out that Judy was not everybody's vision of what the ultimate Mormon woman was like was a real stunner to me."

As I look at Ashmae's poster I see other women emerging from the blank faces of those that are named. One woman who is named is Esther Peterson, a remarkable women who had an unexpected connection with *Exponent II*. Esther was one of the most distinguished women to emerge from Mormon Utah in the twentieth century. Internationally known for her contributions to the labor movement, the women's movement, and the consumer movement, she served as Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Kennedy administration and worked with Eleanor Roosevelt to created the first Commission on the Status of Women. When she contributed her papers to the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe she made a comment that is certainly relevant to those of us here this evening, "We have a tremendous responsibility to future generations to leave an accurate record of our history, one which lays bare not only the facts, but the process of change."

Esther sometimes felt misunderstood by those she left behind in Utah, when she came east to teach. In the memoir she wrote late in life, she said that though she was touched by the many honors she had received, what perhaps most pleased her was being elected to the Beehive Hall of Fame in Utah. "When I was a young woman, so many of my neighbors and friends in Utah considered me a lost cause for having lived my life the way I did. . . but they never knew me well."

Thanks to the combined efforts of Mary Bradford and Sue Paxman, Esther and her cousin Virginia Sorenson were honored guests at the *Exponent II* Retreat held in Hillsborough, New Hampshire in 1984. I have a vivid memory of seeing her seated in the dining room in the lodge, her white braids wrapped around her head. As she listened to people sharing their troubles she said that in her experience it helped to turn outward. Then she began to sing the old Mormon hymn, "Have I done any good in the world today, have I helped anyone in need." She wasn't preaching. She was just affirming the way in which that ethic, ingrained in her Mormon upbringing, had continued to shape her life.

So as we consider our 40-year history, we might think about the closing passage in Esther's memoir: "I want people to believe. I want them to care. I want them to be curious. I want them to look at injustice and ask, What can I do about that? I want them to know that they can certainly make a difference."[1] She concluded with a favorite poem by poet and activist Bonaro Overstreet:

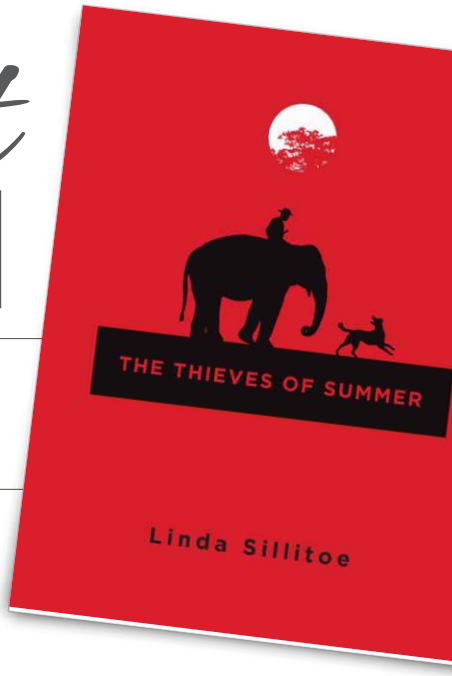
> You say the Little efforts that I make
> will do no good: They never will prevail
> to tip the hovering scale
> where Justice hangs in balance.
>
> I don't think I ever thought they would.
> But I am prejudiced beyond debate
> in favor of my right to choose which side
> shall feel the stubborn ounces of my weight.

I believe that the founders of *Exponent II* chose well.

NOTES:

[1] Esther Peterson with Winfred Conkling, Restless: The Memoirs of Labor and Consumer Activist Esther Peterson (Washington, D.C. : Caring Publishing, 1995), p. 190, 192.

The Elephant IN THE ROOM



Review of Linda Sillitoe's *The Thieves of Summer*
By Rebekah Orton • Arlington, Virginia

In her foreword to *The Thieves of Summer,* Cynthia Sillitoe writes, "This is a book my mother, Linda Sillitoe, almost didn't live to finish writing. She began it in early 2009. Despite serious and debilitating illnesses, she completed and submitted the manuscript to Signature Books just weeks before her death in April 2010. In this one story, she combined all the phases of her thirty-five-year career: poetry, fiction, true crime and history." The book by *Exponent II*'s former poetry editor, Linda Sillitoe, was published posthumously this year, five summers after her death.

I received my copy in July when the thermometer neared one hundred and the humidity was so ferocious that stepping out on my porch to pick up the package made sweat drip down my back. Still, I couldn't keep myself inside and air-conditioned while I read because the heat outside made a perfect accompaniment to the three months depicted in Sillitoe's novel.

The Thieves of Summer begins in the summer of 1938 with the story of Princess Alice, a based-on-true-life elephant that lived in Salt Lake City's Liberty Park and occasionally escaped from her enclosure to roam the neighboring streets. In the book, Princess Alice is a beloved attraction for the eleven-year-old Flynn triplets, Annabel, Bethany, and Carolee. The elephant becomes the focus of Bethany's summer project: she wants to teach Princess Alice a new trick. Annabel and Carolee, on the other hand, are more interested in solving the mysteries of two missing persons their police officer father is investigating at work.

The novel follows the elephant and the Flynn family through an eventful summer where thieves threaten in multiple ways. Death steals a beloved aunt, premarital sex steals a couple's unconnected future, a kidnapper steals a child, and a girl with sticky fingers can't keep her hands off the merchandise at the local ZCMI. The storylines are so ambitious and varied that none achieves a deep look at any one character or situation. Instead they give a quick glance at multiple scenarios that add up to greater than their collective parts. The binding nature of all of them provides a fictional overlay to a beautiful portrayal of a real animal, real events, and real locations.

"The storylines are so ambitious and varied that none achieves a deep look at any one character or situation. Instead they give a quick glance at multiple scenarios that add up to greater than their collective parts."

For me, the character Evan Flynn, the triplet's father, is the best example of Sillitoe's ability to blend truth and fiction. Evan is loosely and lovingly based on Sillitoe's own

father, a Salt Lake City policeman whose whispered conversations of a missing child's unsolved disappearance fuels one of the main storylines in the book. The triplets provide a means into the story and needed comic relief from the weightier storylines, but Evan is the backbone of the novel as he capably faces challenges at both home and work.

Sillitoe's clear language and facility with historical events are the true stars of this novel. Her Liberty Park breathes with life in a way that only a writer who grew up there could bring. Her care with the story of Princess Alice coming to Salt Lake and her life with trainer Hugo Stucka—an amalgamation of real life trainers "Dutch" Snider and Harry Petchell—makes passages about the fictional Princess Alice sing. Sillitoe evokes both the lighter and darker sides of life in the thirties, from party phone lines and summer gardening and canning, to the reality of fatal diseases like mumps and whooping cough and a depression that forces the triplets to share a single second hand bicycle.

The final storyline is both wrenching and a little unbelievable, but Princess Alice acts so heroically that I was willing to suspend my disbelief in favor of this remarkable elephant. I put the book down reluctant to leave Sillitoe's memorable Salt Lake City. But I returned to the heat and humidity refreshed thanks to spending a few hours with Alice.

BIRDSONG/EVE'S SONG

By Robert A. Rees • Mill Valley, California

"Birdsong brings relief to my longing. . . Please, universal soul, practice some song . . . through me!"
-RUMI

"Never again would birds' song be the same And to do that to birds is why she came."
-ROBERT FROST

On the way to Tennessee Beach,
hearing a meadow lark singing,
ringing through the reeds,
I thought of Eve
and wondered:
Did the poet get it right?
Was she in their song or
they in hers?
Who sang first
and who first listened
with wonder
there in the marvelous garden?
Perhaps neither,
but both, from the First Singer himself
who sang melodies as he fashioned feathers
and hummed tunes as he shaped
tiny throats and tongues—
of the red-winged blackbird,
the Indigo Bunting,
the Scarlet Tanager,
the nightingale—
so that when they flew from his hands
and swam in wind,
they blazoned to all the garden round his singing,
his songs.
And when he shaped hers from moist clay,
his hand delicately forming the slight hollow
of her throat,
making her voice different from all the birds'
and from Adam's as well,
He breathed the breath of life into her voice,
into her heart,
and with it his own treasure-trove of song,
the music of stars and spheres
of suns and deep darkness,
of all creation,
so he could hear back from her
and all her daughters
the notes of his singing
accompanied by
all the birds—
a rapture of praise
ringing through the world.

Call For Submissions:

The Summer 2015 issue will explore the theme of Transitions.

What would you do if you knew you could not fail? The woman from this painting is contemplating that question and we're asking our readers to do the same. The Summer 2015 issue will explore transitions and facing difficult life choices. Transitions are a process of going from one way of being in the world to another. What is changing in your life? How are you evolving and what have you learned? What is still unclear? Please share with your sisters in the Exponent community. Submit through email to editor@exponentii.org. Submissions should be between 800-2000 words.

"What Would You Do", by Emily McPhie

Check it out

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THE PASSING OF THE BATON

Exponent II *is excited to announce new editorship beginning in summer 2015: Margaret Olsen Hemming (Editor-in-Chief) and Pandora Brewer (Managing Editor).*

Longtime readers will best know Margaret as our incredible Art Editor and former Layout Editor. In addition to the work she has done for *Exponent II* (which has included fundraising and board responsibilities), Margaret has a BA in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland and an MA in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University. She is also an AmeriCorps alumna, and previously worked for the International Rescue Committee and the Academy for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at American University. She is currently raising three young children.

Pandora Brewer has been involved with *Exponent II* since 1990. She has written and edited for the magazine and is a recurring presenter at the annual retreats. Professionally, Pandora has worked for Crate and Barrel since 1989 and has held multiple positions in stores and at the corporate level. She is currently heading up a Process Improvement Team for the company. Pandora is a proud mom to two grown-up boys and the hungry wife of culinary-inclined husband. She is a perma-blogger for the *Exponent* blog.

Exponent II is delighted that its legacy of standing on "the dual platforms of Mormonism and Feminism," as iterated in its first issue in 1974, will continue with our new editors.